Aligning healthcare research with consumers, policy, and service needs

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Background

Improving the quality of care while using an efficient cost model is a major goal for many healthcare providers. In a growing number of countries, value-based healthcare (VBHC) is used as a concept leading to improvement by measuring outcomes and supporting more efficient coordination of care through benchmarking and reporting [1]. However, the current implementation of VBHC is not systematic and is often presented as the solitary solution for improving outcomes and cost efficiency, but how improvements can be implemented across an organisation remains unclear. Regardless of the improvement approach, evidence-informed decision-making and research translation into policy, health promotion, and clinical practice are the current and future directions of healthcare. Research provides a scientific underpinning to identify interventions and discoveries that work best, don't work as well, or not at all; and contribute to the advancement of healthcare. The health research pipeline consists of diverse stakeholders who have some role in health research, but the margins around this are not always well defined. Alignment of priorities is presumed to contribute to enhanced organisational performance, just as misalignment is expected to undermine performance [2]. For about a decade it has been argued that organisations should see research as an integral part of the health system and, more recently, like care, being assessed for its value, and therefore research should be prioritised and supported based on its value to the health system.

Defining an Integrated Learning Health System

The Institute of Medicine defines an integrated learning health system as one where "progress in science, informatics, and care culture align to generate new knowledge as a natural by-product of the care experience, and seamlessly refine and deliver best practices for continuous improvement in health and healthcare." [2]

A Case Study: Molecular Screening Therapeutics (MoST) Trial

Using cutting-edge molecular and genomics to choose suitable drugs for treating a variety of cancers that are currently incurable. About 30% of cancers diagnosed are incurable and result in 50% of all cancer deaths. Precision or targeted therapy is the new direction for treatment. The outcomes of MoST include:

- Improved patient outcomes and experience
- Adoption of personalised medicine
- Collaboration with NSW research institutes, Canberra Health Services, and ACT Health Directorate to deliver research-based care

Canberrans fighting a range of currently incurable tumors now have the best-personalised treatment in the world and the trial eliminates the need to travel to Sydney or Melbourne to access this research-based care at no cost to the patient – enhancing the patient experience while addressing cross-border government relationships. The ACT medical community benefits from being part of a learning culture. This project is fully aligned with Government health priorities and policies in cancer care, including the cancer care strategy, the Territory-Wide Services Plan, and the Government's investment in personalised medicine.

Genomic Cancer Medicine Program

> = PATIENT CONSENT

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References

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Methodology: Developing a sense of shared purpose

To explore what various stakeholders prioritise, we are currently consulting with our key research partners including the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health ServicesAustralian National University, University of Canberra, primary care, and consumers. Consultations comprise targeted discussions around research enablers, and consumer policy and service needs that are most valued among different stakeholders; and facilities, equipment, and resources that are vital to each group to deliver high-value research. Key drivers and enablers for conducting high-value research in health care and service delivery are being identified, and contextual insight facilitated through the research machinery.

It is envisaged that the findings will support the development of research strategic planning and a framework to implement VBHC where research is aligned with health system needs and collaboratively delivered by partnerships between consumers, Governments, academia healthcare providers, and industry. In the ACT, governance models, like the ACT Health and Well-being Partnership Board and platforms like HealthANSWERS, provide the necessary leadership and collaborative coordination of stakeholders to achieve a learning health system that inclusively and equally listens to achieve the best health outcomes for consumers.

Strategic Alignment of health research can be achieved by:

- Research partners aligning their research with the health system's needs.
- Policymakers prioritising research that focuses on consumer and health system needs.
- Investment in research that provides high value to our health system, consumers, and community.

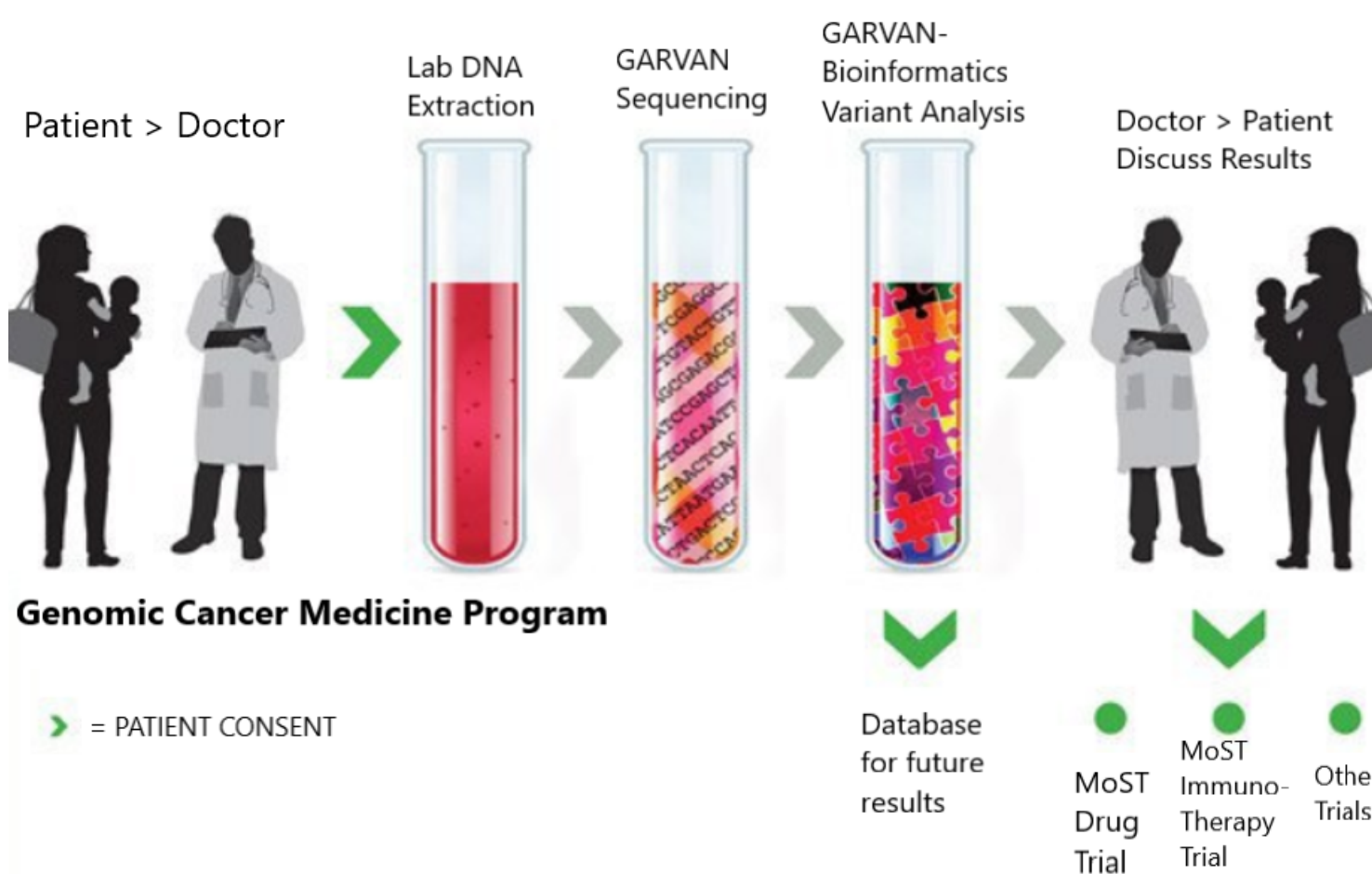The Collaboration is bigger than the sum of the organisations

Strengthening Alignment with System Needs: Challenges and Strategies to overcome them.

The movement towards an integrated learning health system that aligns research with system needs and stakeholder priorities is not one without challenges and barriers. The consultations with our several research partners and stakeholders helped provide contextual insight into challenges facing the health system, and potential strategies to overcome them.

Implementation of a value-based approach to health research requires a system-wide change in perspective that uses outcomes as drivers for quality improvement instead of as endpoints. Second, it requires technology to linking outcomes to care delivered by the organisation; comprehensive high-quality data, access to data and governance; encouraging continuous learning and improvement cycles. Third, it requires strategic platforms that facilitate an open learning and sharing environment that can be leveraged to facilitate good care delivery practices among service providers. Finally, it requires a conducive health and medical governance structure and ecosystem, which fosters and drives high-value research and evaluation.

Potential strategies identified to overcome these challenges include1) Investing in high-quality and high-functioning teams that produce research solutions that can be translated across the system. Harnessing and embedding on-ground clinical expertise within research teams, and engaging with the policymakers to align research with system needs, is critical to delivering high functioning teams that produce research and solutions that can be translated across the system. 2) Anchoring research within a value-based framework to demonstrate value benefit to patients and providers, and deliver outcomes for the system. This would have the potential to ensure high-quality research that is ethical by design and leverages existing research enablers and infrastructure is efficiently leverage to achieve outcomes. 3) Continuous evaluation of current establishments and initiatives can be a powerful mechanism for the health system to stay agile and committed to continuously improving their ways of working, and review outcomes and impacts of engagement and participation, as it provides teams, individuals, and organisations with an opportunity to reflect on their relationship and learn how to better engage with one another[4]. 4) Effective organisational strategies for co-design that support the paradigm shift from consumer 'participation' to consumer 'leadership'; with a focus on building the research capacity of consumers and communities to be involved in health research, and in the development, planning,and implementation of health services [5]