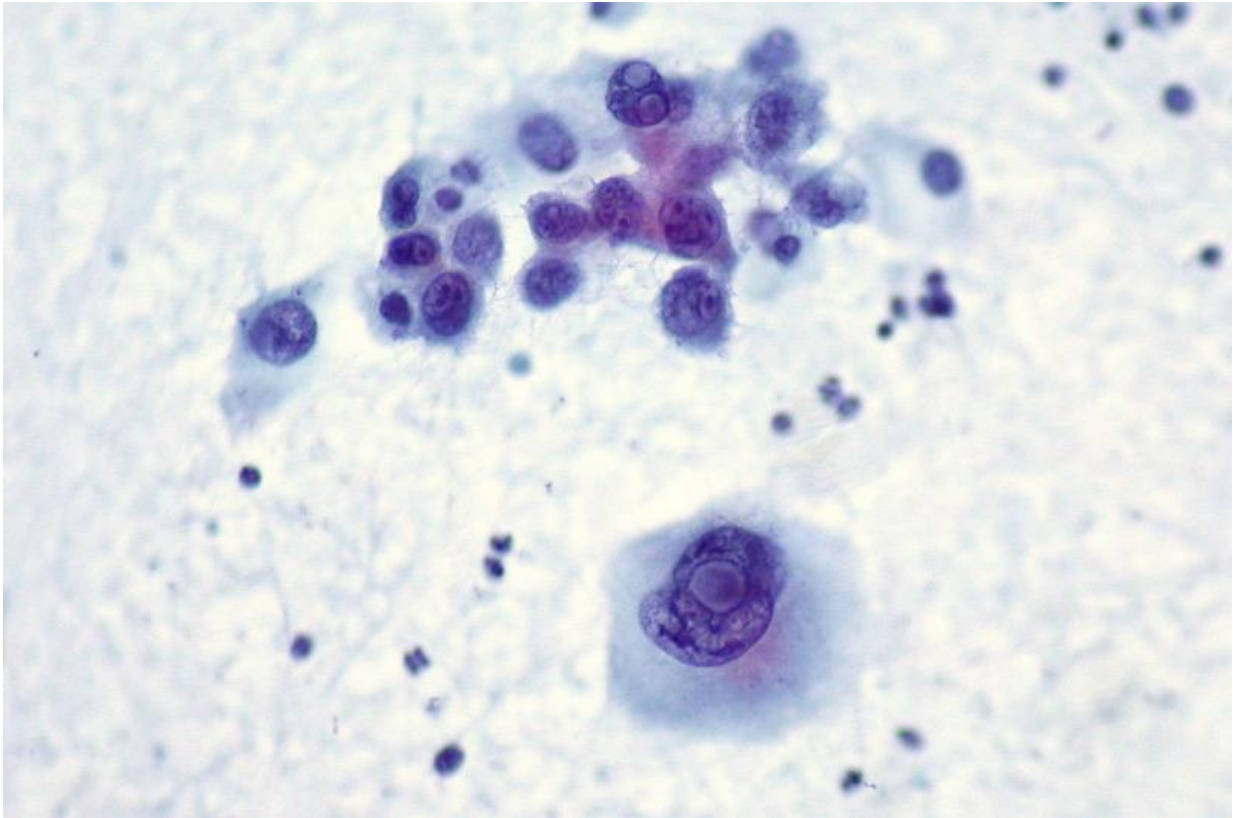


Unique data records allow melanoma study

June 19 2015, by Kerry Faulkner



“Previous research points to a link between melanoma and pancreatic cancer,” Dr Ward says. Credit: Ed Uthman

A large scale investigation of family links involving melanoma has been made possible because of WA's unique system of linking population health records.

The baseline research into [melanoma](#) was led by UWA Centre for Genetic Origins of Health and Disease researcher Dr Sarah Ward who says the study was only possible because WA has a comprehensive population-based health record linkage system.

It is one of few places in the world to have one.

The Data Linkage System connects more than 30 datasets including genealogical information and [cancer](#) registrations allowing near total capture of cancer cases.

Dr Ward says WA has the second highest incidence of melanoma in Australia.

"We knew there was this familial basis for melanoma but no one's ever looked at it on this scale before in WA," she says.

The researchers investigated if an individual with a family history of melanoma is at increased risk of other cancers and conversely, if individuals with other types of cancers in the family are at greater risk of melanoma.

Dr Ward says the study showed those with a [family history](#) of melanoma had a much higher than anticipated risk of also contracting the disease; nearly double the expected risk and there was no aggregation with other cancers.

However, Dr Ward says the genealogical database started in 1974, skewing the results to a young age group and this could have influenced the outcome.

"That we didn't find co-aggregation with other cancers is interesting but this was an exploratory analysis," she says,

Young cohort cuts out some cancers

"We think we didn't find it because it was such a young sample and the type of cancers we were looking at for association generally occur in older people.

For example, prostate cancer is not commonly found in young people and the researchers had an under-representation of older people and therefore those cancers.

"Previous research points to a link between melanoma and pancreatic cancer," she says.

"We may not have found it because it doesn't exist or because it was a young cohort.

"That there is the early onset of some kinds of cancers in WA warrants further investigation.

"We did find some evidence of a link to lung cancer even though it was not statistically significant which also warrants some further investigation."

Dr Ward is currently heading research using Cancer Council Western Australia funding and an updated data set to investigate bowel cancer and its link to other cancers.

More information: "The aggregation of early-onset melanoma in young Western Australian families." *Cancer Epidemiol.* 2015 Jun;39(3):346-52. [DOI: 10.1016/j.canep.2015.03.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.canep.2015.03.007)

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