

Gaps in public and expert views on cancer risk

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There are substantial gaps between expert recommendations and public knowledge about risk factors for cancer, though these gaps are closing for some cancer types, according to new University of Otago research.

The study, led by Dr. Rose Richards of the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit, interviewed over 1000 adults from across New Zealand, and compared these findings with a similar study done in 2001.

In the recent survey, most people could identify risk factors for lung cancer and melanoma, but few could recall key risk factors for cervical, breast and bowel cancer.

A positive finding was that, despite being low, awareness for some [cancer types](#) had increased since 2001. More people could identify risk factors for [bowel cancer](#) (52.8% of the 2001 study were unable to identify any risk factors, compared to only 34.8% of the recent study), and awareness of [breast cancer risk](#) factors had increased among women.

"These gains in knowledge are important," says Dr. Richards.

"Cancer agencies are competing for attention in a crowded and contested health information environment, so it is great to see that some of these key messages are hitting home."

The current New Zealand Cancer Plan includes a goal of increasing

public awareness of [cancer risk factors](#), and researchers believe that strategies to increase cancer literacy should be part of broader evidence-based public health programmes to support risk behaviour change.

"These findings show that there are still significant gaps in awareness which need to be addressed' says Dr. Richards, "particularly for some types of cancer such as bowel, breast and cervical cancer."

The study, titled "Knowledge of evidence-based cancer [risk factors](#) remains low among New Zealand adults: findings from two cross-sectional studies, 2001 and 2015," was published in the *Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention*.

More information: Knowledge of Evidence-Based Cancer Risk Factors Remains Low Among New Zealand Adults: Findings from Two Cross-Sectional Studies, 2001 and 2015 *Asian Pac J Cancer Prev*. 2017 Nov 26;18(11):2931-2936. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29172261

Provided by University of Otago

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