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Data from CancerCare Manitoba now housed at MCHP will lead to better research and care for cancer patients

The recent addition of the Cancer Registry to the Population Health Research Data Repository housed at the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) at the University of Manitoba has opened the door to new opportunities for cancer research in Manitoba. This is demonstrated in a new study by MCHP.

Each time Manitobans come into contact with the healthcare system, data is collected. CancerCare Manitoba has been collecting information from each new cancer patient in the province for decades. This includes the age, sex, type of cancer and treatment, and how advanced the patient's cancer was when it was detected. These data are stored in the Manitoba Cancer Registry, which is one of the most complete cancer data collections in the world.

Until recently, the Cancer Registry was not available for linkage to other data in the Repository except under specific circumstances. But thanks to a new agreement with Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors, MCHP now has a copy of the Cancer Registry. Researchers can use the Repository at MCHP to conduct studies that would not be possible without data linkage.

"Incorporating the Manitoba Cancer Registry data into the Repository at MCHP enables a broader range and scope of cancer-related investigations using linked and de-identified administrative data, including those about the social determinants of health, comparative effectiveness of cancer treatments, and quality of care across the continuum of care," says Dr. Lisa Lix, a Professor and Manitoba Research Chair at the University of Manitoba, and Principal Investigator of the study.

Dr. Lix and her colleagues first tested the quality of the data. They found that the cancer data were of very high quality with very few missing values. Then the authors began to look at how they could use the linked cancer data to better understand cancer care in Manitoba.

One of the research areas they looked at was the pattern of emergency room visits among Manitoba cancer patients. They found, for example, that while

many cancer patients visited the emergency room more often around the time of their cancer diagnosis compared to a group of patients who were cancer-free, this varied by the type of cancer. Lung cancer patients visited the ER about 10 times more than the cancer-free group during diagnosis, while breast cancer patients had increased visits that were only 4 times higher.

"Overall, linking the Cancer Registry data to the MCHP Repository means we can answer more complex questions about cancer patients and healthcare in our province. This data linkage will help researchers, healthcare providers, and policy makers in Manitoba, and ultimately, this will mean improved care for cancer patients," says Dr. Lix.

The full report: Cancer Data Linkage in Manitoba: Expanding the Infrastructure for Research can be downloaded from the MCHP website at: umanitoba.ca/medicine/units/mchp

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MCHP is a research unit in the University of Manitoba's College of Medicine, Faulty of Health Sciences. It's also a research centre of excellence that conducts world class population-based research on health services, population and public health, and the social determinants of health. The work of MCHP supports the development of evidence-informed policy, programs and services that maintain and improve the health and well-being of Manitobans.