

# Addressing shortcomings in the communication and provision of information to cancer patients

by Prof Ina Fourie

The expected growth in the number of cancer patients, the complexity of human information behaviour, and the ongoing frustrations and concerns reported by cancer patients due to a lack of information and inadequate communication of information reinforce the need for research to find ways of studying such needs in various cancer contexts and to find solutions. These may include interventions such as information portals, patient education, patient support groups and training health care professionals to use the Internet as an information resource in an appropriate manner to guide patients' information seeking.

The need to draw on different disciplines and research approaches seems very important to deepen insight and find solutions. The recent 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on Cancer, Culture and Literacy, presented by the Moffitt Cancer Centre at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort from 20 to 22 May 2010, again brought to the fore the dire need for information provision spanning cultures and languages, and the recognition of the impact of inadequate literacy levels when promoting screening for timely actions for cancers that may be prevented or cured if diagnosed at an early stage, for example, some breast, prostate and colon-rectal cancers.

A presentation entitled *How can studies on information behaviour expand the body of knowledge on cancer, culture and literacy?* attempted to awaken the interest of stakeholders working from a medical and health care background in considering the growing body of literature on information behaviour and information seeking, which is published in the domain of information science, and fully recognising and exploring what can be learned from health care and other supporting sciences.

Information behaviour is a subdiscipline of information science with its own theoretical base. It is seldom acknowledged in studies on cancer information needs and information-seeking behaviour. It includes studies that focus on cultural and language groups and covers studies about information needs, information seeking and information searching, and the dormant information needs and decisions not to react to information needs. It also covers the difficulty of recognising and adequately expressing information needs.

Studies on information behaviour inform the provision of information, for example, through libraries, and the design of systems to retrieve information, such as databases and portals. Such systems may support the provision and communication of cancer information to diverse cultural and language groups, as well as planning interventions for information provision and patient education, and health information literacy programmes. Various models on information behaviour and the subfields of information retrieval and information seeking were mentioned with reference to their implications, for example, Ingwersen's cognitive model, which is also relevant to those who are developing interventions. 📍

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