

WA Health Translation Network
Coordinated Research Response to COVID-19
Minutes
Monday 23 March 2020, 3.00pm – 4.00pm
Via Zoom

Attendees

Aaron Berghuber, Aron Chakera, Chris Reid, Darren Gibson, David Morrison, Dominic Mallon, Ed Litton, Edward Raby, Garry Allison, Geoff Stewart, Glen Arendts, Graham Hillis, Grant Waterer, Greg Blatch, Helen Atkinson, Jacquita Affandi, Jeff Keelan, Jeremy Nicholson, John Barrett, Justin Manuel, Kelly Beer, Margaret Jones, Merrilee Needham, Michael O’Sullivan, Owen Robinson, Peter Richmond, Pip Brennan, Stephen Stick, Sue Critchley, Tim Colmer, Toby Richards.

1. Background

Gary Geelhoed gave a brief introductory background to those attending the meeting. Primarily this is seen as an opportunity for WA to coordinate a collaborative research driven response to the COVID-19 outbreak, to inform service delivery, reduce transmission, protect both healthcare workers and patients and provide timely treatment. It was agreed that a collaborative approach was essential and encouraged through WAHTN by both the Department of Health and the Minister for Health. In working together we have access to WA’s sizeable and relatively isolated population that can result in meaningful data and hopefully rapidly translatable research findings.

2. Possible WAHTN resources which could be diverted to the COVID-19 response

- Consumer Involvement via the WAHTN Consumer and Community Health Research Network (CCHRN, led by Deb Langridge) and Health Consumers Council (Pip Brennan)
- Clinical trial support through the WAHTN Clinical Trial Data Management Centre (led by Chris Reid)
- Online learning management system through the WAHTN Research Education and Training Program (RETProgram)
- Secretariat support
- Web page / communications / repository for resources
<https://www.wahtn.org/wa-covid-19-research-coordination/>

3. Current status update from WAHTN Partner Organisations

North Metro Health Service (NMHS) (Aron Chakera)

- NMHS are happy to help in any way and are able to assist with manual data.
- Biobanking: there is an opportunity to expand and utilise the software management system ‘OpenSpecimen’ which Telethon Kids Institute has been trialling and are supportive of. To build and set up a new cohort within OpenSpecimen will cost approx. \$15k.
- Aron has reached out to a number of resources for space. There is a bit available in terms of freezers but more would need to be purchased, noting it would take 4-5 days to purchase freezers.
- Research Assistants across NMHS could potentially be re-deployed to assist.

South Metropolitan Health Service (SMHS) (Merilee Needham) and Australian National Phenome Centre (ANPC) (Jeremy Nicholson, Toby Richards, Glen Arendts, Kelly Beer)

- Have adapted the European ISARIC protocol (link on WAHTN website: <https://www.wahtn.org/wa-covid-19-research-coordination/>) for WA including all public hospitals. Developed redcap database which has capacity to be utilised as a state-wide coordination facility.
- ANPC have developed an automated pathway for biobanking, from presentation to biobanking. Almost ready to go with core data set to provide high quality data and access to samples. Coordinate research with ANPC so not duplicating with minimum access manpower. ANPC are happy to share this with any other institution.
- ANPC are interested in detection. A new test created could work in less than 2 hours potentially prospectively identifying more severe patients. Have enough capacity to diagnose in real time and feedback into health care system. 95% of ANPC resources has been allocated to this.

East Metro Health Service (EMHS) (Grant Waterer)

- EMHS are keen to participate. Currently continuing to collect samples.
- Noted that WA will be offered lots of opportunities in relation to trials as we are in the tail end of the pandemic.

Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAHS) (Peter Richmond)

- Don't expect to have a large number of paediatric patients.
- Currently looking at transmission through families via the ORIGINS study. Working with Western Diagnostics Pathology for sample collection.

WA Country Health Service (WACHS) (Justin Manuel)

- No particular updates, interested in a protocol, particularly on a regional level.
- Concerned about country patient access for clinical trials. Unsure from a clinical perspective if a patient diagnosed with COVID-19 would be transferred to Perth.

WA Department of Health (Darren Gibson)

- The WA Department of Health have attended meetings with National Clinical Trials group, who will be issuing a national statement shortly. Darren Gibson will circulate and document will be added to the WAHTN website.
- Approx. \$2million funding will be released by WA Department of Health in the coming days for research with a 2 week turn around. There was significant concerns raised by the attendees that this would not be sufficient nor would the timeframes work in this rapidly evolving environment. Darren confirmed this was the first stage and advised there may be a potential for additional funding to become available. Consideration could be given to infrastructure rather than research projects.

Telethon Kids Institute (Stephen Stick)

- Telethon Kids Institute stressed a priority is to maintain the health of the workforce and reduce transmission to ensure Australia avoids what is occurring internationally.
- WHO contacted Nick Curtis regarding a proposal to study BCG vaccination of healthcare workers run between Melbourne (Monash) and Perth. Ethics currently going through Monash.

- Good results from IFN2 β trials in China showing dramatic effect (to be published in Lancet in the next day or so).
- An App has been developed through an ORIGINS sub study which is able to collect data through OpenSpecimen combining other platforms ie REDCAP.

Institute of Respiratory Health (IRH) (Geoff Stewart)

- IRH has a large number of clinical staff dealing with COVID-19 directly.
- IRH clinical trial unit is dealing primarily with front line and operational issues such as patients are not wishing to continue in the current environment. Staff are looking at an increased number of home visits.

Murdoch University (David Morrison)

- David Morrison confirmed that the ANPC are leading this evolving situation from Murdoch's perspective.

University of Western Australia (UWA) (Tim Colmer and Jeff Keelan)

- UWA's immediate priority was ensuring teaching and learning was conducted online.
- UWA Research Committee have a meeting scheduled, Jeff Keelan advised he would inform that group that WAHTN are coordinating a research response.
- Group of 8 Universities are coordinating a response to assist with planning in a broader capacity.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) (Margaret Jones)

- ECU have prioritised their efforts towards supporting teaching efforts and online capacity for students, however, are very keen to be involved in all discussions from a research perspective.

Curtin University (Garry Allison)

- Curtin have also prioritised online learning mobilising.

University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) (Greg Blatch)

- UNDA have spent a huge effort to ensure Modules are online. UNDA are currently looking into research continuity plans.

Ed Litton

- Has a randomised platform trial specifically designed to deal with a pandemic (REMAP-CAP). Currently recruiting internationally (53 sites internationally but will be 100 shortly). Has ethics sorted for FSH/SCGH/RPH with STOG and Armadale coming online/expressing interest.
- Needs research co-ordinators to facilitate increase volume of patients. Outcome data needed in 21 days ie basic data set needed quickly.
- It was raised by attendees that the Department of Health could consider directing funding to this trial. Ed confirmed that the immediate need is for staff to facilitate data collection. Alternate ways to obtain consent also needs exploring to minimise risk to research staff (ie waiver from Attorney General possible in these unusual pandemic circumstances).

Pathwest (Dominic Mallon)

- Jim Flexman is coordinating research.

- Ensuring that we all liaise with Pathwest closely is important. Pathwest will be invited to attend future meetings.

4. Common themes

Gary Geelhoed asked attendees if there were specific sub-groups for common themes that would be useful. Initial thoughts are the following:

Consent

- Queries regarding whether the Attorney General would allow a waiver of consent in the current environment amidst a pandemic. Attendees discussed the option for WAHTN to send a letter on behalf of this group to Government. However, it was noted that this would create additional noise which isn't ideal in the current environment
- Considerations for pre-consent and operationalise different ways to achieve pre –consent with the patient i.e. waiver of consent initially and utilising smart phones.
- There is a huge amount of positivity towards health care workers currently. Public sentiment. Can this be utilised to good effect?
- It was agreed that a public statement should be issued from the Government to tell and reassure the public that significant collaborative research effort was underway in the hope of finding treatment solutions as quickly as possible.

Ethics and Governance

- Gary raised whether this was a problem at present but the consensus was that committees were working as efficiently as possible under the circumstances.

Biobanking

- As discussed in further detail above. OpenSpecimen options are currently being trialled.
- It was noted that approx. 90% of current biobanking samples are not being utilised.
- The potential to purchase freezers should be explored.
- Pathwest (and Western Diagnostics) should be consulted.

Consumer Involvement

- WAHTN are working closely with Pip Brennan, Health Consumers Council and CCHRN.
- Attendees strongly urged the WA Department of Health to contact HSS and recommend that REDCAP is adopted as a statewide platform. Darren Gibson thought it already was available across the public health hospitals but will seek confirmation.
- All attendees confirmed that there needs for consistency and one message to be sent to the public as there is currently confusion in the community.

5. Summary of proposals and actions

- Further information regarding the availability of WA Department of Health COVID-19 research and infrastructure funding will be circulated by Darren Gibson
- All information discussed above to be circulated and added to the website.
- Attendees to send through any relevant protocols and documents to add to the website

- What is needed is a consistent approach to capture data and relevant samples from patients, infrastructure to allow existing and proposed trials of potential treatments to proceed and the ability to store biological samples.

Next Meeting:

Next meeting will be scheduled on Monday 30 March 2020 at 3pm. Details will be circulated.