

# Practice Research Newsletter

Issue 1, February 2018

## What is Practice Research?

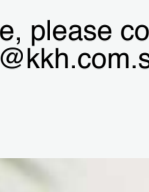
Practice research aims to directly improve practice by generating relevant professional knowledge (The Salisbury Forum Group, 2011).

Where do social work practitioners' knowledge of helping come from? Mainly from five areas -- clinical experience, formal education, training, supervision, and research findings (Witkin, 2011).

Research plays an important role in helping practitioners find ways to address practice questions, improve practice and be more effective in helping clients. It is a systematic and critical mode of inquiry that seeks to contribute to an area of knowledge. In recent years, practice research has gained greater prominence in social work practice.

In 2008, a statement of practice research was developed by a group of interested professionals that comprised of academics and social work practitioners. According to them, below are the key six aspects of practice research (The Salisbury Forum Group, 2011):

Invokes curiosity about practice



Best done by collaboration between practitioners and researchers

Finds effective and promising ways to help clients



Critical examination of practice

Direct relevance to practice



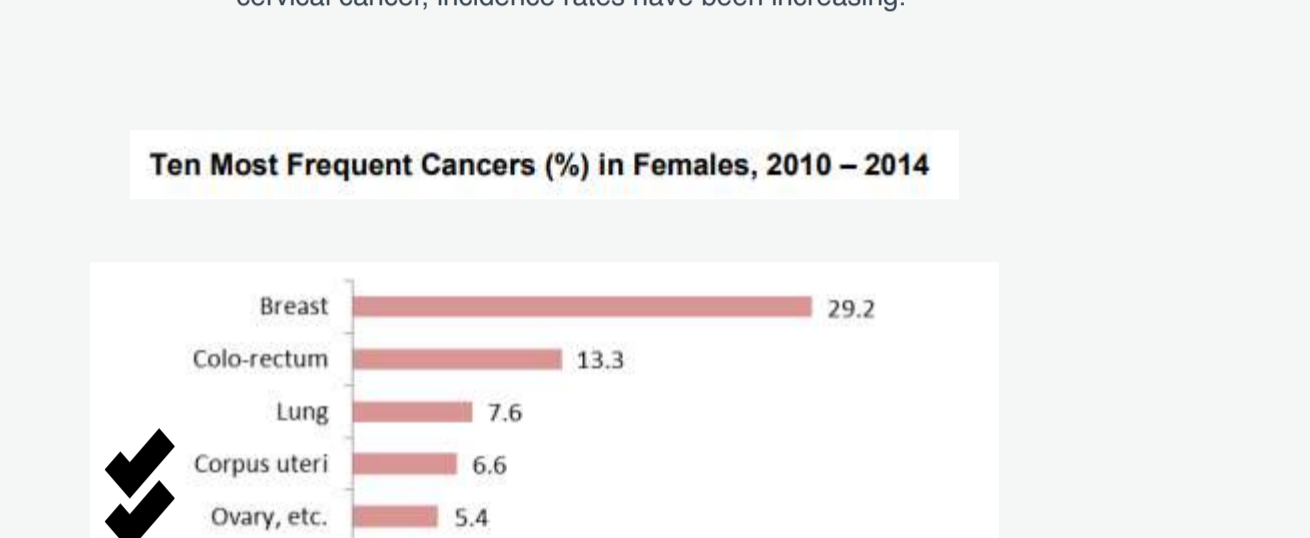
Inclusive way to address complexity of practice and social justice issues

The definition of practice research is constantly evolving (Epstein et al., 2015). But its aims remain largely unchanged -- to generate relevant information from practice so practitioners can use it to make practice more effective for clients.

## Practice Research in Action!

We would like to showcase a research done by our local practitioners! Below is an abstract of a research conducted by Medical Social Workers (MSWs) from KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). The research was presented at the 4th International Conference On Practice Research at Hong Kong in May, 2017.

If you are interested to find out more, please contact Judith from KKH: [judith.chew.th@kkh.com.sg](mailto:judith.chew.th@kkh.com.sg)



### Women's Experiences Of Living With Gynaecological Cancer

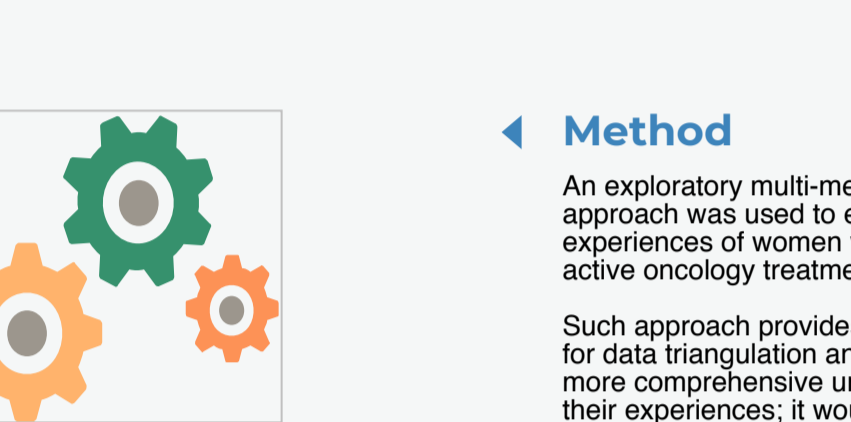
As a result of this research conducted by Judith Chew, Jasmine Lim, Christine Chua, Michelle Aw and Katherine Baptist, KKH MSWs have been able to refine their practice guidelines to better address psychosocial needs and challenges raised by women with gynaecological cancers.

### Abstract

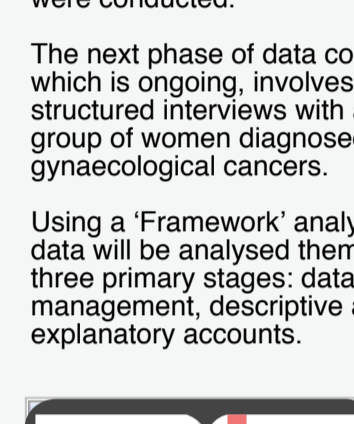
Gynaecological cancers, which affect a woman's reproductive system, were among the top 10 most common cancers among Singapore women from 2010 to 2014.

During this period, the age-standardised incidence rates for cervical, ovarian, and uterine cancers ranged between 7.1 and 14.6 per 100,000. Except for cervical cancer, incidence rates have been increasing.

Ten Most Frequent Cancers (%) in Females, 2010 – 2014



Research have shown that approximately 30 to 50% of gynaecological cancer survivors have unmet needs, particularly in the area of psychosocial support. However, these studies are limited as it primarily involved participants who were undergoing active treatment. Thus, information regarding women's needs beyond the end of treatment is limited.



### Method

An exploratory multi-method qualitative approach was used to examine the experiences of women who completed active oncology treatment in KKH.

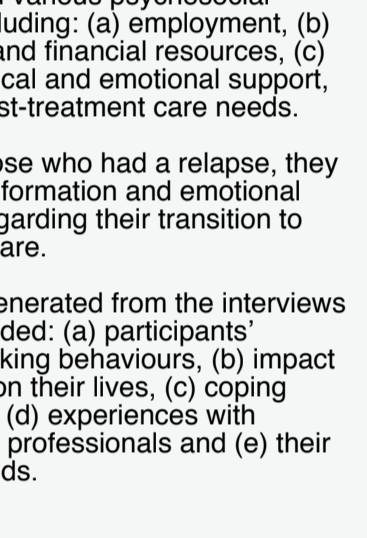
Such approach provides opportunities for data triangulation and facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences; it would have been difficult to obtain through a single data collection method.

### Data Collection & Analysis

In the initial phase, document analyses of case records of women who had completed their medical treatment were conducted.

The next phase of data collection, which is ongoing, involves semi-structured interviews with another group of women diagnosed with gynaecological cancers.

Using a 'Framework' analysis method, data will be analysed thematically in three primary stages: data management, descriptive and explanatory accounts.

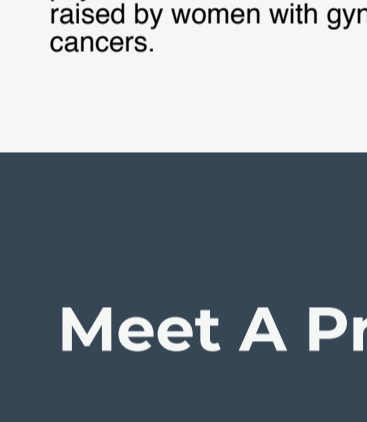


### Findings

Initial review of 20 case records highlighted various psychosocial needs, including: (a) participants' health-seeking behaviours, (b) material and financial resources, (c) psychological and emotional support, and (d) post-treatment care needs.

Among those who had a relapse, they required information and emotional support regarding their transition to palliative care.

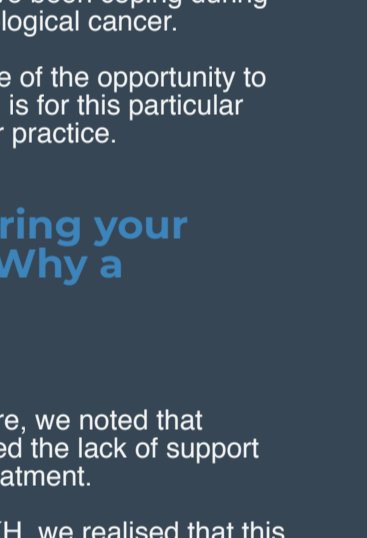
Themes generated from the interviews (n=9) included: (a) participants' health-seeking behaviours, (b) impact of cancer on their lives, (c) coping strategies, (d) experiences with healthcare professionals and (e) their unmet needs.



### Conclusion

Differences between our results and findings from existing studies, which are mainly conducted in Australia, UK and US are likely due to cultural factors.

Based on the combined results from both study phases, we refined our practice guidelines to better address psychosocial needs and challenges raised by women with gynaecological cancers.



## Meet A Practitioner-Researcher

Ever wonder what is it like for a practitioner to do research? How does it help with his or her practice?

Meet Michelle Aw, MSW from KKH. She has been with the MSW Department since 2011, first as a Social Work assistant/Co-Coordinator and then a MSW from 2014.

Michelle was part of the above research team that looked into women's experiences of living with gynaecological cancer.



### So why did your team embark on this research project?

We wanted to do a research project for a few reasons. First, to find out how our patients have been coping during and after their treatment for gynaecological cancer.

Second, we also wanted to make use of the opportunity to specify what social work intervention is for this particular group of patients and to evaluate our practice.



### Can't this be done during your sessions with your research project?

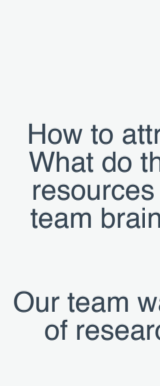
From our initial review of the literature, we realised that research participants have highlighted the lack of support after they completed their cancer treatment.

Reflecting on our own practice in KKH, we realised that this was likely to be a practice gap for us because we have fewer follow-up sessions with patients who completed treatment compared to those receiving active treatment.

This also meant that we could have missed out unspoken needs of our patients. Because we had limited local knowledge and current practice did not give us the opportunity to interview this group of patients, we decided to start a project.

We hope that our understanding of our patients' post-treatment needs will increase through the research process -- which is collecting and analysing information in a systematic way.

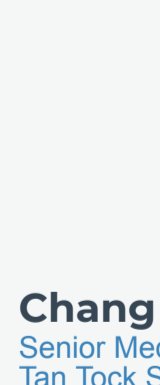
And to refine our current social work interventions to address their psychosocial needs.



### Since you did not have any research experience, did you have any reservations?

I did not know what to expect. But I was a little concerned about time management. First, I was going away for maternity leave and could not contribute much during that period.

Second, when I was back, I had to juggle between my usual caseload and research activities, such as data analysis and preparation for the Hong Kong Practice Research conference. So that was a bit challenging.



### How did you manage those challenges?

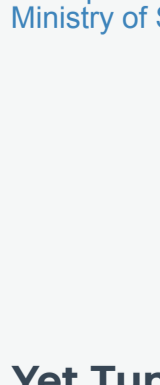
With support from the research study team and the Department. We had "blocked" time to do research and it was helpful in reducing patient caseloads.



### And how was your experience of presenting at a conference?

I was initially nervous before going to HK as it was the first time for me attending an international conference with many other social work practitioners from other countries. Did not really know what to expect.

But when I was there, I thought the presentation setup wasn't too intimidating and I felt comfortable presenting in a small tutorial room with interested participants. As for attending a conference, it was definitely useful as it encourages independent learning where you are free to shortlist research topics that you are interested in.



### Finally, how did your team's research findings help your practice?

I am more mindful to explore the following aspects in greater depth: (i) psychosocial dimension of sexuality concerns, (ii) address losses that related to femininity and their multiple roles as a woman such as individual self, wife, mother, daughter, and (iii) secondary coping strategies that they utilise to deal with challenges.

## Who We Are

Some say, practice is practice, research is research, and never the two will meet. Is that so? Or is there possibility that the two can be married and live happily ever after?

We, a Research Coalition consisting of a small group of social work practitioners, strongly believe that research should be an integral part of practice, and any practitioner can do research such as individual self, promote practice research in a 'ground-up' manner. Hopefully, this will help us to increase greater awareness and collaboration in research, and empower practitioners to do research with available resources!

## Social Proof

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practices in the social service sector.

Locally, as seen in the recent two editions of the Principal Social Work Seminars, there has been a recurring theme along this line. In 2016, there was a work-group on evidence-based and evidence-informed practice. While in 2017, there was a work-group on strengthening the nexus of research, advocacy, policy and practice. Internationally, a series of conferences on practice research has also been taking place.

It is with the intention of championing the movement of doing practice research in the social service sector that our Research Coalition has been set up!



Principal Social Work Seminar 2016 at Singapore



The 4th International Conference on Practice Research at Hong Kong

## Our Team

How to attract practitioners who are new to practice research to get their feet wet? What do they need? More lectures? Or practical guidance? Or both? What kind of resources might they need? Where can we find them? Meeting after meeting, our team brainstormed ideas, scribbled in whiteboard, discussed ferociously, so yes it has been tough but stimulating!

Our team was born mainly from the work-group focusing on strengthening the nexus of research, advocacy, policy and practice, which was a key theme for Principal Social Work Seminar 2017.



**Alice Koo**  
Senior Social Worker,  
Rotary Family Service Centre



**Anita Ho**  
Training & Service Development  
Consultant,  
Eldercare and Carer Support



**Chang Gett Lim**  
Senior Medical Social Worker,  
Tan Tock Seng Hospital



**Dilys Tan**  
Assistant Director,  
Advocacy & Research,  
National Council of Social Service



**Evelyn Lai**  
Executive Director,  
Vereya Community Services



**Joseph Chan**  
Centre Head,  
Sengkang Family Service Centre



**Judith Chew**  
Principal Medical Social Worker,  
KK Women's and Children's Hospital



**Lim Puay Li**  
Senior Social Worker,  
Office of Director of Social Welfare,  
Ministry of Social and Family Development



**Low See Yim**  
Principal Social Worker,  
Montfort Care



**Martin Chok**  
Senior Manager,  
Youth Services,  
Care Corner Singapore Ltd



**Olivia Shepherdson**  
Assistant Director/  
Principal Social Worker,  
Ministry of Social and Family Development



**Robyn Tan**  
Research Fellow,  
Advocacy & Research,  
National Council of Social Service



**Yet Tun Hoong**  
Head of Programme,  
AWWA Family Service Centre

## FAQS

### 1 How do I contact your team if I am interested to find out more about your cause?

You can contact us at [gett\\_lim\\_chang@tsh.com.sg](mailto:gett_lim_chang@tsh.com.sg)

### 2 When can I expect the next newsletter?

Are you a practitioner who is new to practice research? Would you like to find out how to do it and be linked to resources? Stay tuned, as we are going to reveal more in our upcoming newsletter in April 2018!

### References

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