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Building a framework for geriatric oncology in New Zealand

Age is the single most important risk factor for developing cancer with two thirds of cancer deaths occurring among people who are 65 years and older. Much like the rest of the world, the number of people aged 75 and above living in New Zealand is expected to more than double in the next 30 years. Research has shown that the way cancer affects older people and the best treatment for cancer in this population can be very different. This highlights the importance of improving the research and development of cancer services to meet this important and growing need.

Geriatric oncology is a subspecialty dedicated to improving the way older patients are assessed and treated for cancer. This subspecialty has emerged in many developed countries including France and Australia over the last decade. Unfortunately, this subspecialty has not taken root in New Zealand. The purpose of this technical fellowship is to allow a newly trained medical oncologist the opportunity to watch and learn how geriatric oncology is practiced in two tertiary academic hospitals in South Australia. It is hoped, that the observership will provide a framework to initiate a geriatric oncology service in New Zealand and to spur a new interest group among healthcare professionals caring for cancer patients in the country.