

## **Review of the CECo Methodology Theme State of the Science Meeting on Prognostication – 15 October 2009**

The meeting was opened by Dr Clare Stevinson who gave an overview of CECo and some insight into the beginnings of the Methodology theme. This was followed by some of Professor Chris Todd's intellectual thoughts on the definition of prognostication and why we may wish to prognosticate, in clinical practice and research. The benefits of being able to predict an individual's prognosis were highlighted in relation to patients, relatives and policy makers.

Dr Paul Glare who is a Medical Practitioner working in Pain and Palliative Care Services at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, was the first invited speaker to take to the podium. Using case studies and a quiz to keep the audience on their toes, the need for prognostication was eloquently demonstrated. An overview was given on physician's attitudes to predicting survival. This was taken from a survey of a group of doctors and it was concluded that they were poorly trained, did not like doing it, and patients expected too much certainty in relation to prognostication. Two points were identified during this presentation in prognostication: the first was how do we make the prediction and the second was how do we tell patients? The final summary point from Professor Glare was, "there is not much point in improving foreseeing and foretelling, if we are not going to use it to change decisions".

After these words of wisdom we move onto Professor Karel Moons presentation. Karel Moons works at the Julius Center for Health Sciences and Primary Care, at the University Medical Centre Utrecht, in the Netherlands, and gave an excellent overview of clinical prediction models: what, why and how? This was a clear overview of where prediction tools are used in clinical practice and an excellent summary of the development of tools. The presentation outlined the process, pitfalls and how to validate predictive models. This session added a practical dimension to prognostication and placed predictive modeling in context within the literature and clinical environment. The application of predictive modeling in research was thought provoking for the audience.

Next up to the podium was Dr Paddy Stone from St George's Hospital Medical School, London, who shared with the audience, experiences from the PIPS (Prognosis in Palliative Care Study). This allowed the audience to be taken through the reality of the research process, starting with the initial ideas of developing a prognostic index. The main aim of the study was to produce a prognostic index that was more accurate than doctors' estimates of survival. The difficulties working with palliative care patients was discussed and the magnitude of the study hit home when the numbers of patients screened for recruitment, competent and non-competent, were shared with the delegates. Methodological decisions in the study were touched on, including defining palliative care patients and how to assess the chosen variables via interviews, questionnaires or scales.

The final speaker was Professor Michael Downing, Director of Research and Development at Victoria Hospice, in Victoria, Canada, who gave a presentation on implementing a prognostic indicator in clinical practice. The idea of introducing the concept of chance in the use of survival tables was one of the main points of the presentation. It was interesting to explore the use of prognostic indicators with patients and how this information is delivered. The benefits of a more evidence based approach to discussing prognosis with patients was highlighted which, included a method of explaining chance to patients.

Workshops rounded the day off and started to get everyone thinking about research questions in and around prognostication using the information gained from the expert speakers. All the groups came up with good ideas for research both in predicting prognosis and also in how this is communicated to the patient. A list of research priorities to stimulate future work in this area was generated. All the presentations are available on the CECo website under the Methodology theme.

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