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New cancer drugs hold great promise but often require complex treatment protocols

The last number of years have seen a proliferation of new innovative cancer drug therapies being tested in clinical trials at CCMB, nationally, and around the world. Some of these therapies have since become available for clinical use while many more are showing promise in current trials.

Innovations in drug technology often necessitate new ways of processing information, administering trials, and delivering clinical services. Increasingly, multidisciplinary teams are required to operate trials. One example of this is CAR-T therapy, a type of cancer immunotherapy that uses the patient's immune cells, called T cells, that are genetically altered in a lab to enable them to locate and destroy cancer cells. CAR-T treatment requires hospital admission, patient monitoring for side effects by nurses, oncologist assessments, and pharmacists to prepare necessary drugs. Put simply, it takes a community to run a clinical trial.

CCMB's Clinical Trials Unit also works with external partners. For example, Radiopharmaceuticals, a group of drugs containing radioactive isotopes, can only be administered in nuclear medicine departments, which CCMB does not have. Our team liaises with nuclear medicine physicians and other experts. In turn, these consultations lead to the development of new protocols that shape future clinical trials.

There are several advantages for Manitobans resulting from CCMB participating in clinical trials of novel therapies. Most importantly, cancer patients may have access to beneficial treatments not widely available. Because trials are administered by clinical teams, participating nurses and oncologists become familiar with the new therapies and potential side effects. When the trial drug is eventually approved and funded for clinical use, this familiarity can immediately benefit patients. CCMB's involvement in these new methods and technologies helps to recruit and retain top oncologists and investigators looking to stay at the forefront of cancer treatment.

Marc Geirnaert, Director, Provincial Oncology Drug Program comments, "New therapies are making a difference in patient's lives. It's important to remember all of these therapies started with people enrolling in trials".