Cancer information seeking

I would like to draw colleagues' attention to some newly available data from CancerBACUP, the UK's leading cancer information charity. CancerBACUP has a unique data set of information collected from people using its freephone helpline, which provides a detailed picture of cancer information seekers.

CancerBACUP's helpline nurses answer over 40 000 enquiries each year and the charity keeps anonymised records of every fifth enquiry. These records include socio-demographics such as the gender, age, ethnic group and occupation of enquirers, along with type of cancer and the main topics of enquiry.

Readers may be interested to know that, although CancerBACUP aims to answer 'any question on any cancer', over a quarter of enquiries are about breast cancer and over three-quarters of enquiries are from women.

CancerBACUP has already used this information to identify the extent to which specific

groups of people do or do not use the service and to measure the effectiveness of strategies used to increase the number of enquiries from specific sectors of society. It is now inviting interested parties to submit proposals to interrogate these data further, with a view to learning more about the types of information sought by various groups affected by cancer.

A small sample of this valuable information has now been published online and makes fascinating reading for anyone interested in access to cancer information. I encourage all to visit CancerBACUP's website (<http://www.cancerbacup.org.uk/Aboutus/Research>) where further details of this valuable resource are available.

Klim McPherson

Visiting Professor of Public Health Epidemiology,
University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
Chair of CancerBACUP's research steering group