

# Media Release

Thursday November 15



**Clinical  
Oncological  
Society of  
Australia**

## Thousands decline lifesaving genetic cancer checks

**More than 60 per cent of adults with a high genetic risk of cancer are declining offers for potentially lifesaving testing and counselling, according to new research presented in Adelaide today.**

The researchers will tell the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA) Annual Scientific Meeting today (Thurs. 15/11) that despite the increasing potential to reduce the burden of cancer in high-risk families, thousands of lives are being lost due to under-use of existing technology.

Dr Graeme Suthers, head of the familial cancer unit at North Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital, said around 5000 Australians were diagnosed each year with potentially fatal cancers that could be prevented or detected early through genetic testing or surveillance.

Dr Suthers said the unrealised potential of familial cancer centres to reduce the overall impact of cancer was particular high, as cancers linked to genetic factors were more likely to develop at a relatively young age.

"The potential for reducing cancer burden is enormous," he said. "We could, for example, prevent almost all deaths from familial bowel cancer by identifying individuals at risk and giving them regular colonoscopies to pick up polyps or early-stage cancer.

"Yet the majority of people at high risk do not participate in programs that might save their lives. Our studies show that at least 60 per cent of people who are approached because of an identified family risk decline offers for genetic counselling and surveillance."

Dr Suthers said the health system needed to evolve in an organised way in response to the emergence of genetic technology, including professional support for general practitioners who were at the front line of cancer prevention, early detection and referral.

"We also need behavioural research to understand why at-risk individuals decline approaches that might save their lives," he said.

COSA President, Professor David Goldstein, said while people identified with a familial risk might be understandably anxious, they should see genetic technology as an opportunity, as screening and early detection of cancer had significantly reduced mortality and morbidity.

"More than 60 per cent of people diagnosed with cancer in Australia today will be alive in five years," Professor Goldstein said.

"This figure would be far higher among people at high risk of familial cancer if they sought the benefits of attending a familial cancer centre."

Dr Suthers will present his findings at 1.30pm on Thursday in Meeting Room 10 at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

### Media contacts

Krista Eleftheriou m. 0400 855 244 [krista@cancersa.org.au](mailto:krista@cancersa.org.au)

Glen Turner 02 8063 4100, m. 0412 443 212 [glen.turner@cancer.org.au](mailto:glen.turner@cancer.org.au)