



Media Release

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Social stigma adds to lung cancer patient 'distress'

Brisbane: Patients with lung cancer and their families need psychological support to cope with the range of challenges they face, a scientific conference of cancer experts will be told today (15/11).

Dr Jimmie Holland, researcher at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in the US, will tell the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting that psychosocial care must be integrated into cancer treatment.

According to Dr Holland, lung cancer patients face the additional distress caused by the lethal impact and social stigma of their disease. "Patients with lung cancer have one of the highest levels of depression among all cancer patients," she said.

"Many feel their cancer receives far less in research dollars and that there is little emotional support, as if they got what they deserved. They feel abandoned.

"The diagnosis and treatment of cancer is a major life stress for the patient, their family and their close community. Patients often suffer anxiety, depression, confusion and relationship strain, in addition to financial stress and physical illnesses."

However, Dr Holland said she was optimistic the stigma associated with lung cancer was slowly diminishing for several reasons, including: targeted therapies increasing quality and length of life; genetic research showing that smoking was not the only cause of lung cancer; and changing attitudes towards lung cancer and its causes.

Clinical Oncological Society of Australia President, Professor Bogda Koczwara, said lung cancer was the most common cause of cancer mortality in Australia, with more than 7600 Australians dying of the disease each year.

"It is important that we continue the public health message that smoking increases the risk of cancer," Professor Koczwara said. "However, no-one 'deserves' to get cancer. Blaming a lung cancer patient who smokes is blaming the victim. Smoking is a powerful addiction that most smokers wish they could overcome."

Professor Koczwara said around a third of cases in women and 10 per cent in men were not related to tobacco use. "Patients with lung cancer should not be stigmatised, whether they smoked or not."

Thursday, 9-9.20am Room M3, Brisbane Convention Centre

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