



Media Release

Tuesday 13 November, 2012

Twitter: #COSAIPOS

Patients missing out on benefits of complementary therapies due to doctors' lack of knowledge

Brisbane: Patients are being denied complementary therapies that may improve their quality of life due to a lack of knowledge by health professionals, a conference of cancer experts will be told today (13/11).

Dr Carlo Pirri, from Murdoch University in Western Australia, will present research to the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia's (COSA's) Annual Scientific Meeting on the efficacy and safety of 50 complementary and alternative medicines, based on a review of 400 studies published in medical journals worldwide.

According to Dr Pirri, many complementary therapies can assist patients with symptom and pain relief, both from the disease as well as the effects of some treatments. "Acupuncture for example, can help not only with pain relief, it can reduce nausea and in head and neck cancer patients, stimulate saliva production," Dr Pirri said. "Physical activity programs can be particularly beneficial, even in advanced cancer patients."

However, Dr Pirri said failure to integrate complementary therapies into medical education, along with a risk-averse profession, meant they weren't being prescribed to the extent they could be.

"We know the use of complementary and alternative medicine has grown rapidly in Australia and it is now estimated that more than \$4 billion is spent each year," he said. "But most of it is not being prescribed by physicians and patients aren't telling their doctors what they are taking."

"If safe and effective complementary therapies were offered in cancer centres with conventional treatments, doctors would be more confident about talking to patients and making referrals."

COSA President, Professor Bogda Koczwara, said if health professionals were better informed about complementary and alternative medicines and talked more openly with their patients, patients would be potentially less likely to pursue alternative medicines that could be dangerous. "Alternative medicines, especially in place of conventional cancer treatment, pose serious health risks," Professor Koczwara said. "But there is evidence now that many complementary therapies given alongside of conventional therapies can improve quality of life."

Dr Pirri's presentation will include his 'top 10' complementary therapies.

Tuesday 12.15-12.30pm, M3, Brisbane Convention Centre

MEDIA CONTACTS

Glen Turner on 0412 443 212 or glen.turner@cancer.org.au

Sophie West on 0404 178 704 or sophie.west@cancer.org.au