



Media Release

13 November, 2013

'Angelina effect' saving Australian lives

Adelaide: A scientific conference of cancer experts will hear today (13/11) how referrals to cancer genetic clinics have doubled since Angelina Jolie announced her risk-reducing mastectomy.

According to Mary-Anne Young from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Victoria, more than 94% of the referrals are people categorised as either high or medium risk of having a genetic predisposition to cancer. "The majority of the referrals we're getting, around 80%, are related to a family history of breast and ovarian cancer," Ms Young said.

Presenting at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's (COSA's) Annual Scientific Meeting, Ms Young said referrals trebled in the immediate aftermath of Angelina Jolie's story and have remained at double the previous volume since then.

In the six weeks prior to Angelina Jolie announcing that she carried the 'faulty' BRCA1 gene, genetics clinics in NSW, Vic and SA received 340 referrals.¹ In the six weeks after her announcement, there were 760.

"These patients can now receive genetic counselling and testing if appropriate, and discuss strategies to reduce their risk," Ms Young said.

BRCA1/2 carriers like Angelina Jolie are at a significantly greater risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer than the general population. Options to reduce the risk of breast cancer include regular screening, risk reducing medication e.g. tamoxifen or preventive mastectomy. Surgery is currently the only option to reduce ovarian cancer risk.

COSA President, Associate Professor Sandro Porceddu, said around 5% of the 15,000 breast and ovarian cancer cases diagnosed in Australia each year were due to an inherited gene.

"Being aware of a genetic risk means patients are more likely to either avoid cancer or detect it at an earlier stage when treatment is more likely to be successful," Prof Porceddu said. "Ultimately, this greater awareness of genetic risk will save lives."

Anyone with a strong family history should speak to their GP. Women between 50 and 69 years old are encouraged to attend screening every two years (free screening is also available to women aged 40-49 and over 69 on request.)

¹Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Vic, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, NSW, Westmead Hospital NSW, Familial Cancer Services, South Australia.

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