



Media Release

Wednesday 13 November 2013

Less fatigue for cancer patients not on chemo

Adelaide: Research being presented to a conference of cancer experts today (13/11) shows cancer patients who don't have chemotherapy are less than half as likely to experience fatigue as those who do.

The study of bowel cancer patients, presented at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's (COSA's) Annual Scientific Meeting, found just 30 per cent of patients who weren't on chemotherapy experienced fatigue, compared with 70 per cent of those having chemotherapy.

Lead authors, Associate Professor Janette Vardy and Dr Haryana Dhillon, from The University of Sydney, said levels of fatigue were assessed in patients before chemotherapy commenced and at 6, 12 and 24 months.

"Our results show that fatigue was reported in 70% of the patients undergoing chemotherapy at the six month mark, compared to 31% of those not having chemotherapy," Professor Vardy said. "Interestingly, the rate of fatigue among patients not on chemotherapy wasn't significantly higher than the general population (22%)."

According to Professor Vardy, fatigue can seriously diminish a cancer patient's quality of life. "We know fatigue is the most bothersome symptom for cancer patients," she said. "There are effective interventions to treat fatigue, the most encouraging of which is to exercise."

The team's research also showed that the presence of fatigue at baseline was a predictor of having fatigue later on. Patients were also more likely to develop fatigue if they had a history of anxiety or depression.

"If health professionals recognise fatigue early on, they can introduce interventions to try and stop this becoming a serious issue for patients," Professor Vardy said.

She said doctors could ask their patients to complete a simple questionnaire, which had been well validated, to assess their level of fatigue and determine whether they may benefit from an appropriate intervention.

COSA President, Associate Professor Sandro Porceddu, said the research wouldn't necessarily change treatment recommendations, but could help treating oncologists and GPs better support their patients. "We have effective interventions to ameliorate the effects of fatigue and this research suggests we can improve a patient's quality of life by identifying and addressing fatigue earlier."

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