



Media Release

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Australian Government

Cancer Australia

Stigma contributes to distress among lung cancer patients Only 1 in 5 likely to seek psychological support

Adelaide: Stigma associated with lung cancer contributes to increased levels of distress, anxiety and depression, resulting in poorer quality of life for Australians diagnosed with the disease, according to new research presented today (13/11) at a conference of cancer experts.

The study, presented by Cancer Australia to the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's (COSA's) Annual Scientific Meeting, found that stigma was part of the lung cancer experience for smokers and non-smokers, and included both patients and carers.

Presenter and co-author, Sue Sinclair, said a diagnosis of cancer was stressful and confronting for anyone and, for people with lung cancer, this stress could be compounded by the stigma associated with the disease.

"The results of this research show that despite a large proportion of lung cancer patients having increased levels of distress, anxiety and depression due to stigma, only 17% of patients surveyed had accessed a mental healthcare professional and only 1 in 5 indicated an intention to seek psychological support," Ms Sinclair said.

"It is important to address stigma associated with lung cancer so that those people diagnosed receive the full-range of treatment and support available to them."

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women in Australia. While tobacco smoking continues to be the largest single cause of lung cancer, the disease can occur in both smokers and non-smokers.

COSA President, Associate Professor Sandro Porceddu, said stigma associated with lung cancer could be a barrier to both diagnosis and support. "Patients may be less likely to go to their doctor with symptoms if they feel they are likely to be judged and less likely to seek support," he said.

"We need to ensure we take a non-judgemental approach and encourage patients to seek psychological support where they would benefit."

To find our more information on lung cancer as well as information on issues around stigma associated with lung cancer, please visit canceraustralia.gov.au.

More information about the Australian Government's tobacco control initiatives can be found at yourhealth.gov.au

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