



Media Release

Tuesday 12 November 2019

Research shows radiation underutilisation costing lives

Increased use of radiation therapy for prostate cancer patients could improve outcomes

New research being presented today at a leading cancer conference will show how increased utilisation of radiation therapy for prostate cancer patients requiring treatment could prevent 41 early deaths each year in NSW alone.

The research, being presented at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting, used data for nearly 20,000 prostate cancer patients in New South Wales.

Researchers analysed how many patients received radiotherapy and how many additional patients would have benefitted from the treatment if recommendations for the use of radiation therapy based on evidence-based guidelines were followed.

In addition to the potential lives saved, the research showed that appropriate utilisation of radiation therapy could prevent at least 466 instances of "local failure" each year – the term used to refer to cases where treatment fails to stop the progression or return of a local tumour.

Dr Gabriel Gabriel from the University of New South Wales and lead researcher on the project said, "Approximately 23 percent of NSW prostate cancer patients received radiation treatment. This equated to less than half the optimal uptake rate of 52 percent.

"While active surveillance - where a cancer is closely monitored but not treated – is increasingly being recommended for some prostate cancer patients, for those with localised prostate cancer who do require treatment, radiation can often provide better outcomes and fewer side-effects than surgery. Unfortunately, this treatment option is not always discussed with patients."

The research also found an association between socio-economic status and the treatment patients received. Patients from higher socio-economic status were most likely to receive surgery, while radiation was most common in people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

"Patients who lived further from radiation therapy services were also less likely to receive the treatment, suggesting access to services may also contribute to underutilisation," Dr Gabriel said.

Associate Professor Nick Pavlakis, President of the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia welcomed the latest research and said it highlighted important opportunities to improve treatment for Australia's most common cancer.

"This research shows that referring clinicians need to consider radiation therapy as a proven option for their patients with appropriately selected prostate cancer as per guideline

recommendations. We also need to educate patients on the potential benefits of radiation therapy so that they are aware of this treatment options when making decisions on choice of therapy.

“If we can apply the evidence-based guidelines more consistently in practice we have a clear opportunity to improve outcomes.”

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Tegan.brown@cancer.org.au or phone 0431 248 967.