



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**17 November 2015**

### **Rare cancer patients gain active benefits**

New research unveiled today (17/11) will shed light for the first time on the benefits of exercise for patients with rare cancers, showing that moderate exercise can have a significant impact on quality of life.

The study, which will be presented at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting in Hobart, was conducted by Edith Cowan University in collaboration with Cancer Council WA. It involved 127 patients with 25 different types of rare and less common cancers including ovarian, leukaemia and brain cancer, undertaking a three month community based exercise program incorporating both weight and cardio training.

Researchers found that not only were the majority (60%) of patients capable of completing the clinic-based exercise program, but that it also greatly improved their strength, balance and fitness, and even helped reduce their medical bills with an estimated saving of almost \$60 per month.

Associate Professor Prue Cormie from the Institute of Health and Aging at Australian Catholic University said patients participating in the program experienced an 18% improvement in their ability to lift themselves out of a chair, a 20% improvement in their strength and an 8% improvement in their ability to walk 400 metres.

There was also an overall 18% improvement in balance. "Patients improved their physical wellbeing, experienced less fatigue, and six months later, follow-up surveys revealed continuing improvements in quality of life," Associate Professor Cormie said.

"Although the activities might sound basic, for cancer patients with a rare cancer diagnosis, the ability to complete these everyday tasks with ease can have a significant impact on their lives.

"For some patients undergoing treatment, even small activities – like brushing your own teeth or holding a cup of tea – can be extremely difficult. After three months of exercise, some patients regained the ability to complete tasks they believed they had lost all together."

Clinical Oncology Society of Australia President, Professor Mei Krishnasamy, said it was encouraging to see exercise research being extended to cancers that were often understudied.

"Those with rare cancers generally have poorer outcomes – survival rates are generally lower and there are a number of unmet needs, so the researchers were stepping into the unknown by working with these patients and testing their ability to perform regular exercise," Professor Krishnasamy said.

"This preliminary research is the first of its kind to try and determine the suitability of exercise for patients with less common cancer types, as well as measure the impact on their lives."

Associate Professor Cormie, who was also awarded Cancer Council WA's Early Career Cancer Researcher of the Year award early this year for her work in exercise and cancer, said that these are just preliminary observations and further work is required to determine what exercise recommendations should be given for these patients.

“It was excellent to see that so many rare cancer patients were capable of completing regular exercise. Sixty per cent completed the program, and attended 75 per cent of classes. There were no adverse events as a result of exercise, which is encouraging.

“We need to continue to do more research in this area, but ultimately we could see a significant change in the recommendations doctors give their patients with rare and less common cancers.”

### **Key findings**

- 75 participants (59%) completed the exercise program, with 75% attendance.
- No serious adverse events occurred during the exercise sessions.
- Significant improvements were recorded from baseline to post intervention in physical function (8%), repeated chair rise (18%), strength (20%), dynamic balance (18%) and various domains of quality of life.
- Estimated monthly medical expenditure was reduced by an average of \$57.
- There was a trend towards improved fatigue and no difference in psychological distress.
- 37% of participants completed follow-up questionnaires and reported continued significant improvements in quality of life.

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### **Notes to Editors:**

**“Effectiveness of Exercise for People Diagnosed with Rare and Less Common Cancers” will be presented at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting in Hobart on Tuesday 17 November 2015.**

**Methodology:** 127 participants with rare and less common cancers, predominately ovarian 15%, leukaemia (13%) and brain (10%) were self-enrolled in a three-month community based exercise program involving aerobic and resistance exercise supervised by accredited exercise physiologists in WA. Assessments were conducted at baseline and post-intervention, with questionnaires also administered six months later.