



MEDIA RELEASE

16 November 2016

How cancer survivors can conquer their fears

New research to be presented at a cancer conference today shows that a new and innovative model of psychological support can help cancer survivors conquer one of the most common issues experienced after treatment – ‘fear of recurrence’.

Professor Jane Turner, from The University of Queensland, will present the findings of the new research at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting on the Gold Coast. She says that fear of cancer returning is one of the most common issues experienced by cancer survivors.

“Around 4 in 10 cancer survivors are living in significant fear of their cancer returning. As well as being extremely distressing, it can have a range of health and cost implications. Some patients react by frequently checking for new lumps and bumps and constantly visiting the doctor seeking reassurance, while others avoid check-ups all together.”

The Conquer Fear Trial is a randomised controlled trial involving melanoma, breast and bowel cancer survivors that is being conducted over 17 sites. The study aims to identify better ways of meeting the unmet needs of cancer survivors and is testing the effectiveness of five one-on-one therapy sessions using new psychological techniques, delivered over a period of 10 weeks.

“There aren’t currently clear guidelines for how patients with fear of recurrence can be supported. It’s natural for doctors to seek to alleviate cancer survivor’s fears of recurrence for example by ordering additional tests and offering reassurance. Unfortunately these strategies often heighten distress,” says Dr Turner.

Of the nearly 1000 participants approached during the study, 121 patients received the new model of psychological support. The new techniques aims to help the survivor recognise why the fear is present, to acknowledge that the fear is valid, and to learn new ways of handling fear, rather than trying to push it away. Another key focus is helping the person to think about their goals and values for living well into the future.

“We tell survivors that fear of cancer returning is like having an unwanted passenger in your car. It’s always there and at times it can be scary. You can turn around and look over your shoulder every now and then, but it’s important to keep your eyes on the road ahead and keep moving forward,” says Dr Turner.

Researchers found that survivors who completed the therapy experienced a 22 percent reduction in a score designed to measure their level of fear of recurrence, compared with only an eight percent drop in the control group.

Professor Mei Krishnasamy, President, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia says that as more people survive care, more support for cancer patients is required.

“Today 67 percent of people diagnosed with cancer survive at least five years. As more people live longer after a cancer diagnosis we need to widen our focus and research the best ways to support survivors and maximise quality of life.”

ENDS

“A randomised controlled trial (RCT) of a psychological intervention (Conquer Fear) to reduce clinical levels of fear of cancer recurrence in breast, colorectal and melanoma cancer survivors” will be presented at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting at the Gold Coast Convention Centre at 4pm on Wednesday 16th November 2016.

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