



MEDIA RELEASE

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A Man's Pink: Men speak up about male breast cancer

Male breast cancer needs more awareness and specialised care, according to cancer experts and survivors presenting at a leading cancer conference on the Gold Coast today.

Experts speaking at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's (COSA) Annual Scientific Meeting will highlight the unique psychological challenges that males with breast cancer face, as well as genetic mutations linked to the disease and the impact of hormonal treatment.

Alongside the medical experts will be two men, Herb Wagner and Robert Fincher, who will share their personal experiences with the disease and argue that male breast cancer is slipping under the radar because it lacks the advocacy and investment achieved by Pink campaigns focusing on breast cancer in women.

Robert Fincher was 53 when he noticed that his nipple had become inverted. It was initially dismissed as a cyst, but later discovered it was breast cancer. Four years later he discovered that the cancer had spread to his lungs and bones. He continues to live with metastatic disease.

Robert will speak at the event on behalf of the Breast Cancer Network Australia, pointing out that the prominence of female breast cancer messaging makes things more difficult for males with breast cancer.

"There is a persistent myth that only women get breast cancer, and this is perpetuated by the 'Sea of Pink' which makes people like me, with male breast cancer, feel alienated.

"After my treatment, I was given pink information brochures that talked about issues like fitting a bra after surgery. We need to remember that breast cancer has no gender and men with breast cancer need to build a stronger community to advocate for better information, awareness and research."

Herb Wagner, founder of A Man's Pink, a male breast cancer advocacy organisation in the US, is an 11 year breast cancer survivor. He is also on a mission to change the lack of awareness and dialogue about men with breast cancer internationally.

"Many men and sometimes their doctors are quite often unaware that males can get breast cancer. They therefore don't recognise symptoms when they appear, resulting in delayed diagnosis. Male breast cancer accounts for slightly less than one per cent of all breast cancer cases and is nothing to be ashamed of," said Mr Wagner.

Professor John Boyages, from Macquarie University Hospital and author of 'Male Breast Cancer-Taking Control' is leading the session aimed at oncology professionals. He says the numbers of male breast cancer in Australia are low compared to female breast cancer, but still significant.

“Three men every week are diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia, and one male dies every two weeks as a result – often due to delayed diagnosis. Better awareness of male breast cancer could ultimately help us improve outcomes and survival.”

During the session, Dr Jemma Gilchrist, a psychologist from Mind My Health will outline the unique challenges that men with breast cancer face.

“Males with breast cancer often experience embarrassment, shame and feelings of loss of masculinity as a result of being diagnosed with a disease that is stigmatised, rare and typically associated with females. They also often experience mood changes associated with hormonal treatment. Men in this situation need specially tailored support.”

Associate Professor Judy Kirk from the Westmead Familial Cancer Service will suggest that all men with breast cancer should be assessed to determine whether genetic testing is needed to see if they carry a BRCA gene mutation.

“The BRCA genes are better known for their association with breast and ovarian cancer in women, but heritable mutations in these genes are also linked to up to one in 10 male breast cancer cases. The finding of a gene mutation can impact other cancer surveillance recommendations, especially for prostate cancer risk. The finding of a gene mutation is also very relevant for other family members, so it’s important that clinicians know when to refer men with breast cancer for genetic testing.”

Professor Mei Krishnasamy, President of COSA said that this was the first time male breast cancer had been scheduled into their annual conference as a session topic.

“Awareness of male breast cancer is slowly growing, and there is a need for better knowledge of the disease within the medical community. Pink campaigns are one of the cancer community’s greatest success stories – but male breast cancer also needs a strong and influential voice too.”

ENDS

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting session on “*Male Breast Cancer*” will be held at 11am on 16th November 2016 at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre.

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