

MEDIA RELEASE

New research leads way for fast tracking lung cancer diagnosis

A new initiative is successfully encouraging those at higher risk of lung cancer to act sooner when symptoms appear. Experts will today tell a leading cancer conference in Sydney about the innovation that could help improve survival rates for Australia's biggest cancer killer.

Professor Jon Emery, from the University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research and Department of General Practice, will present initial results from the CHEST Trial at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting during Lung Cancer Awareness Month (November). He says that efforts to improve early detection of lung cancer are vital.

"Lung cancer remains Australia's biggest cancer killer and is expected to claim over 9,000 lives this year. Survival rates for the cancer type remain low at less than 14 percent – mainly because over two thirds of those with the disease are diagnosed too late to be successfully treated."

The CHEST Trial is the first of its kind to successfully encourage those at higher risk of lung cancer to seek medical attention when chest symptoms develop. The research involved over 500 Australians who are long term smokers, aged over 55, with a history of heavy smoking, and who are therefore at higher risk of lung cancer.

Participants in the trial were given a one-on-one consultation with a research nurse as well as a self-help manual informed by psychological theory, to help them understand what symptoms to look for and promote them seeking help sooner. Researchers tracked which patients visited a GP when they developed respiratory symptoms.

Professor Emery says the initiative is unique when compared to other trials, which have focused on CT scanning or symptom awareness in the general population.

"In the past there have been campaigns to make all Australians aware of lung cancer symptoms, which include a chronic cough, wheezing, shortness of breath, fatigue, weight loss and coughing up blood. We wanted to trial an initiative specifically targeted at those who were at higher risk of developing lung cancer and empower them to act when respiratory symptoms appeared."

The study found that those who were given the intervention were significantly more likely to see their GP when symptoms developed, and researchers believe that the initiative could be a cost-effective way to help improve lung cancer survival rates.

"This is the first trial to show a positive outcome in terms of successfully encouraging those at higher risk of lung cancer to seek medical attention when respiratory symptoms appear, and it's also relatively cost effective. While in most cases further investigation revealed that the individual didn't have lung cancer, it was important they were checked out."

Professor Phyllis Butow, President, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, said that those who get lung cancer often delay going to the doctor.

"Lung cancer is typically a difficult cancer to treat, but even harder to cure when there is a late diagnosis. Those with lung cancer often take a long time to visit their doctor, sometimes because they feel there is a stigma around chest symptoms when you are a long-term smoker. We need more initiatives like this to find innovative new ways to facilitate early diagnosis."

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The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting Poster Session will be held at 3:00PM - 4:00PM on 13th November 2017 at the International Convention Centre Sydney, Hall 1.

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