



MEDIA RELEASE

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New research shows potential benefits of lung cancer screening for at risk groups

Cancer clinicians meeting in Perth today will discuss the latest evidence in lung cancer screening, with new research showing potential benefits for high risk groups.

Edward Harris from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Curtin University, Perth has been working with a research team led by Professor Fraser Brims over the past five years to trial low dose CT screening in Australians exposed to asbestos.

He will present the research findings at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting today, showing that those who had been exposed to asbestos had similar rates of lung cancer as groups of heavy tobacco smokers, even though in comparison a third had never smoked, and those that had smoked had much less tobacco exposure overall.

The study of 1743 people in WA has so far uncovered 18 lung cancers and 7 cases of mesothelioma.

Dr Harris says the results show that his research may point to a gap in the current guidelines, as those exposed to asbestos without a significant smoking history are not currently recommended to be routinely screened.

“Given the low survival rate of lung cancer, early detection is vital. Most of the people in our study wouldn’t have currently fit the guidelines for lung cancer screening, but our initial results show that it could be lifesaving.”

Dr Annette McWilliams, from Fiona Stanley Hospital, will also lead a wider panel discussion today on the latest developments in lung screening and prevention.

“The results of the NELSON trial in Europe have just been released at the World Conference on Lung Cancer in Toronto, Canada. The NELSON investigators showed that screening with low dose chest CT in current or former smokers significantly reduced deaths from lung cancer. This confirmed the results of the previous NLST study performed in the United States that showed that CT screening reduced lung cancer deaths by at least 20%. The recent results from the NELSON study suggest that women may benefit even more than men.

“No one was expecting the research results to be as convincing as they were – so there is now an increased interest in furthering our research in the Australian context to figure out what’s next.”

During her presentation, Dr McWilliams will provide an overview of screening efforts internationally and in Australia.

Dr McWilliams and Dr Harris are encouraging more clinicians to refer Australians in high risk groups to participate in lung screening trials.

Professor Phyllis Butow, President, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia said that November was Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

“Lung Cancer is Australia’s biggest cancer killer. It’s estimated 12,740 cases will be diagnosed this year, and that almost 9,200 people will die from lung cancer. Improving early detection is vital – and determining how screening could be used effectively is an important step. We also need to overcome the stigma associated with lung cancer and help anyone affected get the support they need.”

ENDS

Notes to the editors:

Dr Annette McWilliams from Fiona Stanley Hospital will present during the Concurrent Session: Lung Cancer Screening and Prevention in Australia at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting, 4 – 5pm, River View Room 4, Perth Exhibition and Conference Centre.

Dr Edward Harris will present “Low dose CT screen-detected malignant and non-malignant findings in a Western Australian asbestos-exposed cohort: results from the first five years of screening.” During Best of the Best Orals - Clinical research featuring Mesothelioma, 4 – 5:30pm, Meeting Room 3 Perth Exhibition and Conference Centre
