



MEDIA RELEASE

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Cancer charities call for better disclosure on cost of treatment

Cancer Council releases new standard for patient financial consent after research shows half of cancer survivors experience financial stress

Australia's leading cancer charities have joined together to call for greater commitment and transparency from doctors and healthcare providers to help inform patients about the cost of cancer treatment.

Cancer Council Australia will present the new draft voluntary *Standard for Informed Financial Consent* at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting (COSA ASM) in Perth today.

The draft standard, believed to be the first of its kind in the world, was developed by Cancer Council Australia in collaboration with Breast Cancer Network Australia, the Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia and CanTeen.

Prior research shows that half of Australian cancer survivors experience financial stress, and that it often impacts their treatment decisions. A recent report from the Consumer Health Forum also found that half of Australians with cancer have out of pocket costs in excess of \$5000. The costs were highest for those with private insurance, however public patients still experienced out-of-pocket costs.

As a result, the new document aims to give healthcare providers clear guidelines to reduce 'financial toxicity' for all Australians receiving care.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO, Cancer Council Australia, said that financial information was particularly important for those Australians with cancer who were already financially disadvantaged.

"The poorest members of our community are 33 percent more likely to die from cancer than the richest and so clearly money is a key factor influencing cancer inequalities.

"While Australia has a great public health system by international standards – the challenges of out of pocket costs related to the billing practices of healthcare providers are becoming increasingly apparent. Many people with cancer commence their treatment without a clear idea of what the costs of treatment are going to be, due to a lack of consistency in how health professionals disclose their own and related costs.

"We know that people with cancer borrow money, access their super, sell investments, re-mortgage their house, increase their credit card limits and increase their partner's working hours to cover the cost of treatment and everyday expenses".

"Cancer charities are joining together to help make sure that those affected by cancer don't experience bill shock and can make informed choices about their treatment options."

Amongst the recommendations in the standard are guidelines on providing full financial disclosure to patients, providing an accurate fee estimate and updating it if things change, engaging patients in decisions about their care, not charging a higher fee for a service that isn't backed up by published evidence and not increasing medical bills for those who have a greater capacity to pay.

Associate Professor Declan Murphy, a Director at Cancer Specialists, and Director of Genitourinary Oncology at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, has already indicated they will be showing their commitment to the new standard in their specialised cancer private practice and championing it to other colleagues in the sector.

“I’m hoping the new standard will be welcomed by all specialists looking after cancer patients in private practice. We have a responsibility to those we care for to make sure we are doing everything we can to minimise financial stress and engaging them in decisions about their treatment. That includes transparency about out-of-pocket costs, as well as advice about options in the public system. It’s not too much to ask.”

Professor Phyllis Butow, President of the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia said that evidence being presented at the COSA ASM would highlight the psychological impacts of the cost of cancer.

“The cost of cancer doesn’t just impact the individual, it also impacts the psychological well-being of the whole family. As well as the high cost of treatment, those with cancer sometimes also are unable to work – furthering their disadvantage and increasing their stress.”

The new standard is now open for public consultation. A copy of the standard and details on how to provide feedback can be found at www.cancer.org.au/financialconsent

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For media enquiries or a copy of the draft standard, contact Hollie Harwood, Head of Media, Cancer Council Australia on 0400 762 010 or hollie.harwood@cancer.org.au