



## Media Release

Tuesday 12 November 2019

### **Research shows low self-rated health may be an indicator of increased Cancer of Unknown Site risk**

Research being presented today at the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting will show that poor self-rated health could be an indicator of increased risk of cancer of unknown primary site, a rare but usually terminal cancer diagnosis.

Cancer of unknown primary site (CUP) is a metastatic cancer with no known site or origin, which typically has a five-year survival rate of just 15%.

The research was funded by the Cancer Institute NSW and used data from the Sax Institute's 45 and Up study to assess socio-economic and health-related factors that impact the likelihood of a person being diagnosed with CUP.

The data examined more than 300 people diagnosed with CUP and compared them to 1000 people randomly selected from the cohort population.

Claire Vajdic, a researcher at UNSW and lead researcher on the study said research had previously shown older age, smoking and diabetes increased the likelihood of CUP however this research revealed new factors that also increased the chance of diagnosis.

"The research confirmed these risk factors and also found people who rated their health as poor and had low educational attainment were more likely to be diagnosed with CUP.

A/Professor Vajdic explained self-rated poor health and low health literacy could present an opportunity for doctors to query and potentially further investigate what was underlying this rating.

"Low self-rated health may be a flag for undiagnosed cancer, and research into its utility in primary care appears warranted."

"It is very challenging to balance the early diagnosis of cancer against the cost, inconvenience and potential harm of over-investigation. Our findings may help in the identification of high-risk patient subgroups that could benefit from better understanding their health care needs and reporting new signs or symptoms such as a lump or weight loss."

"CUP is difficult to treat, and palliative care is often the only treatment that can be provided.

"By understanding the risk factors we are building a profile of patients that may benefit from further enquiry and information sharing. This may result in earlier diagnosis, options for treatment, and a better prognosis.

A/Professor Vajdic said further research was needed before changes could be made in a clinical setting.

Professor Nick Pavlakis, President of the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia said

“While further research is needed before changes can be made in a clinical setting the research was an important step in the right direction. CUP is an understudied cancer, so this research can help us to focus future research in areas where we can make the greatest impact on patient survival rates.”

The COSA Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) is Australia’s premier cancer meeting and is being held at the Adelaide Convention Centre from 12 – 14 November. The ASM is a multidisciplinary meeting, inviting participation from doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and scientists working in cancer care nationally and internationally.

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