



MEDIA RELEASE

27 OCTOBER 2018

**GROUNDBREAKING PROJECT PLOTS BEST POSSIBLE
RADIATION THERAPY TREATMENT FOR CANCER PATIENTS**

Australian researchers have launched a groundbreaking global project aimed at ensuring older cancer patients receive the most appropriate level of treatment.

The study, which is being unveiled at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists' Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) this weekend, outlines an internationally applicable learning model to help radiation oncologists provide high quality care to older cancer patients.

It would eventually provide a dedicated program for radiation oncology training bodies across the world to ensure that radiation therapy – often the least invasive and most appropriate course of treatment for older cancer patients – is best used to improve both quality of life and survival for older people with cancer.

“Cancer is unfortunately on the increase, with worldwide rates expected to hit 15 million by 2020,” said Dr Lucinda Morris, study author and radiation oncologist at Sydney’s Westmead Hospital.

“At the same time, the global population is ageing at an unprecedented rate, with the number of older persons in the world projected to be 1.4 billion in 2030 and 2.1 billion in 2050ⁱⁱ.

“Cancer is a disease of ageing; thus, there will be a huge increase of older people diagnosed with cancer around the world.

“The management of older patients with cancer is therefore rapidly becoming a significant global challenge for oncologists everywhere, but evidence shows that many older people with cancer are not receiving the most appropriate levels of treatment for their needs or condition. Their outcomes following cancer treatment are often worse than their younger counterparts.

“Every older person is unique; one 80-year-old may be frail and in a nursing home, whilst another one may be very active, living at home independently and may still be working. Ideally, cancer treatment should be personalised to each patients’ overall health and well-being, but sadly this is often not happening.

“A major factor for this is a lack of knowledge and training amongst radiation oncologists in geriatrics and geriatric oncology. Put simply, we are not taught how to properly assess and manage older people. We very rarely perform the gold standard assessment for older people, which is called a Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment.

“As oncologists, we very rarely consult or collaborate with our geriatrician colleagues. Oncology trainees around the world are in very strong support of fixing this.

“We aim to develop a learning curriculum for radiation oncologists – the first ever of its kind – which will ensure older cancer patients receive the best possible treatment plan.

“By setting out geriatric learning guidelines we can ensure that future radiation oncologists are able to provide high quality and appropriate care to the rapidly increasing numbers of older cancer patients across the world.”

The first curriculum was established after an international panel, comprising of world-renowned experts in geriatric and radiation oncology, was formed and after an initial needs assessment developed the wide ranging prospective curriculum.

The next stage will see medical specialists treating older cancer patients in various fields invited to share their knowledge and expertise, which will be fed into a final curriculum aimed at radiation oncology and clinical oncology trainees around the world.

“No existing curricula in the world offer teaching about geriatric radiation oncology, making this study a vital and potentially game-changing moment in future cancer treatment,” Dr Morris said.

“It is so important that radiation oncologists are well trained in managing older people with cancer, as radiation therapy plays a huge role in treating a range of cancers. Half of the 100,000 Australians diagnosed each year with cancer could benefit from radiation therapy as part of their overall cancer treatmentⁱⁱⁱ. Modern radiation therapy is very safe and highly effective and can be an excellent treatment option for older patients because of fewer side effects than other treatments such as surgery and chemotherapy.

“With cancer being one of the leading causes of death in the ageing population, investment in improving the quality of treatment and outcomes for older people with cancer has never been so vital.”

ENDS

For more information or for interview requests, contact: Stuart Turner – RANZCR Media and Communications Officer: 0451 002 466 or stuart.turner@ranzcr.edu.au

Notes for editors: The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists is the leading professional organisation for the promotion of the science and practice of the medical specialties of clinical radiology and radiation oncology in Australia and New Zealand. For more information, see: www.ranzcr.com

ⁱ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2003/pr27/en/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/ageing/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16080176>