



MEDIA RELEASE

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**JUNIOR DOCTORS FEEL ILL-PREPARED TO FULLY INFORM
CANCER PATIENTS, NEW STUDY SUGGESTS**

A new study has indicated that junior doctors feel ill-prepared to offer Australian and New Zealand cancer patients with full information about all treatment options - particularly the potentially life-saving benefits of radiation therapy.

The study conducted by Dr Luke Nicholls, a final year Radiation Oncology trainee, will be presented at The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) this weekend. The study showed that almost all of the Australian and New Zealand medical faculties who responded offer minimal radiation therapy teaching in their curriculum, while more than 80 per cent of students do not receive dedicated clinical placements for radiation oncology.

It also showed more than 90 per cent of medical faculties did not have a formal curriculum in radiation oncology, while the time dedicated to radiation oncology teaching was often less than five days in a medical course lasting four-five years.

“While there’s great work being done in research and treatment, cancer will unfortunately continue to severely impact health resources in Australia and New Zealand,” A/Prof Sandra Turner, co-author, a radiation oncologist at Sydney’s Westmead Hospital and Clinical Lead of the Targeting Cancer campaign said. “By 2040, almost two million Australians will have survived or be living with cancerⁱ.

“This emphasises the importance of cancer patients being able to make informed choices about the treatment option that’s best for them and the urgent need to better education about radiation therapy among the medical profession.

“Patients are reliant on the medical profession, be it the junior doctor they meet at emergency, their GP or specialist to guide them through the best treatment plan for them.

“About 50% of all cancer patients would benefit from radiation therapy at some point in their cancer journey for cure or palliationⁱⁱ. Radiation therapy has a critical role in either curing or improving quality of life for cancer patients, yet for decades education in this modern and effective treatment has been drastically under-represented in Australian and New Zealand medical programs.”

The study supports the findings from two other recent studies evaluating the knowledge of radiation therapy among junior doctors. One study, conducted by first year radiation oncology trainee Dr Revadhi Chelvarajah, found that 75 per cent of junior doctors felt they were unable to confidently discuss radiation therapy with patients. The results of this study will also be presented at the RANZCR ASM this week. The other, conducted by final year medical student Ben Bravery, discovered that 90 per cent of final year medical students surveyed wanted more radiation oncology teaching.

Dr Apsara Windsor, the senior supervisor of the project and Director of Radiation Oncology, Central Coast Cancer Centre - Gosford said the current situation indicated future generations of Australian and New Zealand junior doctors risked being ill-

prepared to care for cancer patients in an adequate manner. Dr Windsor said this also highlights the need for radiation oncologists and medical educators to work together to ensure that education of our future doctors aligns with the health care priorities for our patients.

“For many cancer patients, radiation therapy could be their preferred and/or most effective treatment option,” A/Prof Turner said. “Most patients having radiation therapy have this delivered in the outpatient setting over a few minutes a day, meaning patients can continue their daily activities, often including working during treatment.

“All cancer patients for whom radiation therapy might be an option should see a radiation oncologist to understand the pros and cons. Only then can they make fully informed decisions about treatment. All doctors having knowledge of the role of radiation therapy is vital in ensuring this occurs.

“These studies support the need for greater advocacy efforts and involvement of radiation oncologists in curriculum development to improve radiation oncology education in medical schools and for all junior doctors.

“In the meantime, I would urge Australian and New Zealand patients and health professionals keen to discover more about radiation therapy to visit the Targeting Cancer website (www.targetingcancer.com.au and www.targetingcancer.co.nz).”

A link to the study is available [here](#).

RANZCR’s Faculty of Radiation Oncology (FRO) distributed the survey to all 24 Australian and NZ medical schools. The survey was conducted from November 2017 to January 2018 and 16 of the 24 schools responded.

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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 <https://www.cancervic.org.au/research/registry-statistics/statistics-data/cancer-prevalence-in-2040.html>

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