

Media Release

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Brain cancer patients' behavioural problems take heavy toll

GOLD COAST: One in five people with brain cancer show physical aggression and one in four exhibit verbal aggression, according to research presented today (17/11) at a major cancer conference.

The world leading research, by Dr Eng-Siew Koh and other researchers from Liverpool and Royal North Shore Hospitals in Sydney, also found that 30% of family members identified patients displaying disinhibited behaviour.

Dr Koh told the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting that a study of 54 brain cancer patients, their clinicians and carers, provided new insights into what was a poorly understood and little researched problem in Australia and internationally.

"We found that all brain cancer patients are susceptible, regardless of the type or severity of their cancer, even those with benign tumours," Dr Koh said. "Their behaviours are varied and include everything from apathy to anger, aggressive behaviour and loss of inhibition."

According to Dr Koh, patients sometimes found it more difficult to recognise these problems than family members. For example, carers were almost twice as likely to reported disinhibited behaviour in patients compared to patients themselves (27% v 16%). Likewise, anger was reported by carers in 31% compared to 20% by patients. Carers were over three times more likely than patients to report a patient's lack of sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others.

"This is one of the first studies of behaviour in brain cancer patients to employ research techniques drawing upon screening tools new to the cancer field, made possible by research partnerships between oncology and traumatic brain injury rehabilitation researchers," Dr Koh said.

"However, it is still unclear as to the extent to which different tumours and treatments may contribute to the problem, something we hope to clarify with longer term follow-up studies."

Dr Koh said carers often bore the brunt of the behaviour and many were distressed. Carers also raised concerns about a lack of support and information. In response, a series of fact sheets has been produced on the Cancer Institute NSW website (www.cancerinstitute.org.au). Future research will seek to trial a new intervention for patients and carers to help manage problem behaviours.

[Dr Koh will present her research at 4.15pm today \(Nov 17\) at the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting. Meeting Room 7, Gold Coast Convention Centre.](#)

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