

Media Release

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Young cancer survivors falling through the cracks

GOLD COAST: Adolescent and young adult cancer survivors are failing to get the specialised support and services they need to make a full recovery, a major cancer conference will be told today (18/11).

Associate Professor Michael Jefford, from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, will tell the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting, that around 1000 adolescent and young adult cancer survivors each year were missing out because oncologists, GPs and other health professionals aren't equipped to respond to their unique needs.

"Adolescents experience cancers different to those in children and adults," Professor Jefford said. "They also have to deal with a range of issues as they move into adulthood. A cancer diagnosis and treatment can seriously interfere with normal development and affect important aspects such as education, career plans and efforts to establish independence."

According to Professor Jefford, young survivors were falling through the cracks because health professionals in general had little understanding of how to manage these types of situations or lacked resources to provide the intensive support required. While consideration had been given to establishing specialised centres, the dispersed nature of the group meant many would have to travel frequently from outer suburban, regional or rural areas to access the services.

Professor Jefford said that cancer and its treatments could have serious long-term consequences. The cumulative incidence of a long-term health condition, 30 years post diagnosis was 73%, with a 42% incidence of severe, disabling or life-threatening conditions, or even death. "This figure is much greater than in siblings – essentially it is a consequence of cancer and cancer treatments," he said.

"Young people may also engage in health risk behaviours such as smoking, binge drinking or drug use, or may fail to adhere to medical treatment regimes, which can have serious implications. They need to be aware of the consequences of cancer and its treatments and know how they can stay well and return to a healthy, rewarding life."

"We need to make a concerted effort to research and develop age-appropriate models of support, during and after cancer treatments," Professor Jefford said. Online peer support using new media tools like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were among options that could be explored.

[Professor Jefford will present his research at 11am today \(Nov 18\) at the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting. Meeting Room 6, Gold Coast Convention Centre.](#)

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