

Gippsland Cancer Survivorship

A new program to support cancer survivors

Cancer survivors in Gippsland will have access to a new model of care and services to better manage their physical and psychological health.

The Gippsland Cancer Survivorship Project (GCSP) will use a 'shared care' model to ensure cancer survivors have ongoing support from a survivorship nurse, oncology specialist and their GP. The model increases the capacity of healthcare providers to monitor and identify the long-term effects of the cancer and treatment and is well established in many national centres.

While some cancer survivors may be over the worst of their condition by the end of their treatment, it is not uncommon for them to experience ongoing physical or psychological problems such as pain, fatigue and depression which may lead to further health issues.

GCSP lead and medical oncologist, Dr Mahesh Iddawela said the shared care model was an important partnership between cancer specialists and GPs. Under the model, GPs will play a greater role in the monitoring of a cancer survivor's condition.

"GPs have regular contact and have built strong relationships with their patients so they are well-placed to recognise any changes in physical or emotional health. They may also be involved in the management of other chronic conditions which a cancer survivor may have," Dr Iddawela said.

"Under this new model, GPs will have a direct communication and referral pathway to an oncology specialist should specific issues arise."

The GCSP, which has received \$300,000 over three years, is a collaboration between Gippsland Regional Integrated Cancer Services (GRICS), Latrobe Regional Hospital, Monash University, Gippsland Primary Health Network, Bairnsdale Regional Health Service (BRHS), Gippsland Southern Health Service (GSHS) and the Victorian Government.

Survivorship nurse, Taryn Robinson has been appointed to develop the program and assess the individual needs of survivors.

The GCSP will initially focus on survivors from four tumour streams – breast, prostate, colon and lymphoma who received treatment at Latrobe Regional Hospital and in its second year, be rolled out to survivors who have been cared for by BRHS and GSHS.

It is hoped the new program will help to improve cancer outcomes in the region and also provide better co-ordinated cancer care.

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Dr Iddawela said the region's poor health status was a contributing factor to increased cancer risk and lower survival outcomes.

"Smoking rates and alcohol consumption is high as is the number of people who are overweight or obese. We also have a large population of people over the age of 65 who are at risk," Dr Iddawela said.

"Gippsland has more than 1600 new incidents of cancer a year and our focus has been on meeting this demand for treatment. Now there is a pathway of care beyond treatment which we hope will contribute to quality of life for cancer survivors."

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Media note: Dr Mahesh Iddawela is available for interviews on Monday, Thursday or Friday after 2pm. If interested contact GRICS Project Coordinator Michelle Pryce on 5128 0147 or LRH Community Engagement Manager Celine Foenander on 5173 8589.



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