

Cancer and mental health networks

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Practitioners are showing a growing interest in collaborating to better support the mental health needs of people with cancer. This interest has resulted in the establishment of two Victorian-based practitioner networks that connect practitioners working in this field.

Melbourne Psycho-oncology Network

- > The network is coordinated by a health psychologist, with extensive work experience in the cancer area, who also runs a specialist psycho-oncology private practice at Cabrini Health and is Deputy Head of the Cabrini Monash Psycho-oncology Research Unit.
- > A small, multidisciplinary steering committee that includes psychologists, psychiatrists, a social worker, a mental health nurse and a nurse help to coordinate the network. The steering committee arranges guest presenters and rotates facilitation duties. Each meeting is hosted by a different service, organisation or hospital.
- > The network has 128 active network members, including psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses, psychiatrists, GPs, occupational therapists, oncology nurses, genetic counsellors, music therapists and cancer support program managers.
- > Meeting topics have included: Psychological reactions to a diagnosis of cancer or cancer progression; The use of web-based programs and smart phone apps in adolescents with cancer; Psychological ownership and its relationship to the experience of prostate cancer; End of life issues; and The importance of reflective supervision for medical, nursing and allied health staff working in psycho-oncology.

Grampians Cancer and Mental Health Network

- > This new network will be coordinated by practitioners from the Grampians Integrated Cancer Service.
- > It will bring together a range of practitioners from a variety of services who support the mental health needs of people with cancer in the local area.
- > Quarterly meetings will be held in Ballarat, with those based further afield able to videoconference in to the meetings.
- > The first meeting is scheduled for March 2014 and will focus on common mental health presentations in cancer (in particular anxiety and depression), how clinicians screen/assess for psychological distress, multidisciplinary management of patients, how to broach the subject of referral to patients for further psychological support, and how to access psychological services.

Other activities . . . MHPN, mental health and cancer interface

- > MHPN plans to use the successful Victorian experience to establish further specialist cancer and mental health networks in other states.
- > A webinar entitled A Collaborative Approach to Cancer Survivorship and Mental Health was held in October 2013. It attracted a live audience of more than 400 practitioners from across the country. A further 170 people have accessed the webinar's recording (at 31 December 2013). The recording will remain available for view or download on MHPN's website.