

# Flinders Cancer Research

**Improving life with cancer and beyond**

[flinders.edu.au/cancer](https://flinders.edu.au/cancer)





# Introduction

Cancer diagnosis is life-changing and our researchers are developing better ways to address patient needs – physical, emotional, practical – through cancer treatment and beyond.

Our vision of a cancer-free future is built on solid foundations. Four pillars support everything we do:

**Impact** on cancer and beyond. We are developing the best ways to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer and support people affected by cancer in their quest for health and wellbeing.

**Innovation.** We seek creative solutions to important problems.

**Integration.** We come together with the best in care and research, and work with our community to maximise outcomes and bridge the gaps.

**Influence.** Our research informs policy and practice. Our practice drives our research.

At Flinders, we're looking to create more effective treatments, achieve earlier detection and intervention, and prevent cancer from developing in the first place. We also want to help people who have had cancer to get back on their feet physically, mentally and financially.

Flinders Cancer Research brings together research labs, clinical trials and treatment in one flagship facility. We forge connections between more than 150 cancer-focused researchers and clinicians, as well as our patients. We have a shared focus on innovation—on finding new and creative solutions that can make an impact.

A future free from the impacts of cancer is already being imagined at Flinders Cancer Research and is opening up a world of opportunities. ■

“ *A future free from the impacts of cancer is already being imagined at Flinders Cancer Research.* ”



## Life beyond cancer

“The very first anti-cancer treatment was developed in the 1940s, so oncology is a very new discipline. Fast forward 40 years and the term ‘cancer survivorship’ was uttered for the first time, recognising that people with cancers live longer.”

**Professor Bogda Koczwara**

What happens after someone is diagnosed with cancer? Before the 1940s, such a diagnosis was often considered a death sentence, but today we understand that not only is there life after cancer, there is also life with cancer. We need to consider the overall effects that cancer treatments have on patients, both during and after treatment.



“The point is that we are beginning to recognise that having a cancer diagnosis means you might need care and support long term. And, that care and support may rely on support from disciplines that are not conventionally associated with cancer care.”

Flinders University’s Professor Koczwara is a medical oncologist and a senior staff specialist at Flinders Medical Centre. She leads one of the few cancer survivorship programs in Australia designed to integrate clinical care, research and education in the field of cancer survivorship.

“The point is that we are beginning to recognise that having a cancer diagnosis means you might need care and support long term. And, that care and support may rely on support from disciplines that are not conventionally associated with cancer care. People tend to think about cancer treatment as occurring

in the hospital, where you have chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery... but of course to support patients during and after treatment you need psychology, social work, rehabilitation, pain management etcetera!”

Professor Koczwara and Flinders Cancer Research are helping to develop better ways to support patients during and after treatment for cancer to ensure that they can lead a life that is as normal and as fulfilling as it was before the cancer diagnosis. ■




## How cancer changed everything

Monique Bareham was 37-years-old when she found a lump on her breast. She wasn't doing a breast self-exam, and she had no family history of breast cancer, but some instinct pushed her to get it checked straight away. It was lucky she did. In a whirlwind few days, Monique had a mammogram, a biopsy, and a breast cancer diagnosis.

“ I lost my sense of self and purpose.

From then on, Monique was on what she calls the ‘cancer train.’ Doctors took over. They made decisions that led to surgeries, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapies, and other drugs. Then it all ended. She was cancer-free, and it was time to return to life and work as normal—but that’s easier said than done.



“ *Monique didn’t know what she needed. She was in a situation she never expected and didn’t understand. Soon enough, she was also facing a tough financial situation made tougher by the realisation that she wouldn’t be returning to work.* ”

When her treatment ended, Monique discovered that she couldn’t do her job anymore. She struggled with ‘chemo brain’, fatigue, and other side effects. Then she was diagnosed with lymphoedema. Her employer kept saying, “You need to tell us what you need.” Monique didn’t know what she needed. She was in a situation she never expected and didn’t understand. Soon enough, she was also facing a tough financial situation made tougher by the realisation that she wouldn’t be returning to work.

“I lost my sense of self and purpose,” Monique explains. It was like she’d been shoved off the cancer train and stranded at an unknown station, with no idea which direction to take. Later, she would discover that many people struggle with the same issues. She would learn about cancer survivorship through Flinders Cancer Research.

Monique is putting lessons from her cancer experience into action. She has taken on the presidency of the Lymphoedema Support Group of South Australia, and is involved in clinical trials and research projects. She has built herself a life with meaning and purpose, working towards a vision for a healthy life after cancer for her and for other cancer patients. ■



# Work and cancer

People finish treatment and say ‘well you’re cancer free, have a nice life’ but the fact is, even if you can return to work, some of the health problems developed after cancer continue and the longer you stay away from work, the harder it is to return.

Understanding cancer survivorship means examining every aspect of a person’s experience with cancer. From diagnosis, through treatment and beyond, we need to understand the full impact of cancer on patients: physically, mentally, emotionally, financially... surviving cancer has an astounding effect on individuals with cancer and the people who surround them.

Many cancer patients and their families are weighed down by the costs associated with treatment, and the loss of income resulting from time away from the workplace.

More people are returning to work as cancer survivorship continues to rise. Between 1985–1989, the five-year relative survival rate was 49%. By 2010–2014, it had risen to 69%. By the end of 2013, there were 1,038,354 people living with cancer in Australia.

Source: Cancer Australia

There is a range of challenges associated with a return to work. Physical difficulties may require flexibility in the workplace. Returning employees may need to assess their capacity before taking on their normal duties. Health professionals may need to understand their patients’ needs and be aware of their rights and responsibilities with regards to employment.

A history of cancer is associated with higher risk of unemployment, and the risk increases with lower socioeconomic status. Flinders Cancer Research has developed a suite of resources to support patients returning to work, and is working to ensure these resources are made widely available. One such resource is [workaftercancer.com.au](http://workaftercancer.com.au) a guide for people diagnosed with cancer, health care providers and employers; it is the most comprehensive site of its kind in Australia. ■



# The psychology of cancer

Innovations in prevention, treatment and survivorship are the three core strengths of Flinders Cancer Research. All three are affected by our lifestyles and behaviours, by our mindsets and by our social interactions. This is where psycho-oncology comes into play.

Psycho-oncology sits at the interface between psychology and oncology, and deals with the cognitive, affective, social, and behavioural aspects of cancer prevention, treatment and survivorship.

Clinical Psychologist and Cancer Council SA Postdoctoral Fellow (Cancer Support) at Flinders University, Dr Lisa Beatty has over 12 years of research and clinical expertise in the field of psycho-oncology and has attracted over \$1.26M in competitive project grant funding.

She has published over 30 journal articles and has received five awards in recognition of her work, including a 2017 "South Australian Young Tall Poppy Science Award".



After diagnosis, a lot of people are struggling to cope with things like dealing with the emotional stress of diagnosis and treatment, common symptoms and side-effects, dealing with the medical system, and even how to support loved ones. The internet has become a universal source of information around the world and some people with cancer have a strong preference to try to manage on their own terms.

Dr Beatty is also the co-developer of Finding My Way, a free online self-help coping program that offers information, suggestions, and support for women and men who have recently been diagnosed with a cancer being treated with the aim of cure.

Supporting the needs of cancer patients and ensuring that effective, evidence-based resources are available to everyone is our goal at Flinders Cancer Research. ■



## Lessening the impact of head and neck cancers

Head and neck cancer is the sixth most common cancer worldwide and seventh most common cancer in Australia<sup>1</sup>. In 2018 there were over 5,000 new patients with head and neck cancer diagnosed in Australia, and more than 1,000 deaths that year.

1. [head-neck-cancer.canceraustralia.gov.au/statistics](http://head-neck-cancer.canceraustralia.gov.au/statistics)

Head and neck cancer has an enormous impact – physically, emotionally and financially. Imagine someone you know losing the ability of speech, swallowing, saliva and breathing due to their cancer. These vital functions, that we take for granted, may not recover after treatment of their cancer.

Flinders University Associate Professor Eng Ooi is Head of the Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery Units at Flinders Medical Centre.

Associate Professor Ooi, together with Medical Scientist Dr Charmaine Woods and a multidisciplinary team of research scientists and students, are researching ways to lessen the impact of head and neck cancers.

The challenges are many.



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We need to discover new ways to detect head and neck cancers at an early stage to improve treatment options and survival rates.

We need to lessen the impact of complications and improve patients' ability to gain normal function.

We need effective surveillance programs to identify early recurrence so it is treatable.

Associate Professor Ooi's team is aiming to develop a blood test or breath test to detect Head and Neck cancer, to determine if treatment is effective, and to assist in cancer surveillance.

They are also working on “PAD”, a novel tongue injection to help improve vital swallowing function in those patients dependent on tube feeding after their cancer treatment.

They are investigating lymphoedema therapies to improve patients' function and appearance after their cancer treatment.

Associate Professor Ooi and his team are a vital part of cutting-edge research that will help us better understand, detect and treat head and neck cancer worldwide. ■

# Get involved

## Public events

Throughout the year, we run a series of public events to inform, engage and involve our community. These events include our Cancer Insights Public Lectures, a national Cancer Survivorship Conference (held every two years in conjunction with the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia), events to promote healthy lifestyles and fundraising events.

## Participation in research and clinical trials

Clinical trials are essential—from testing new or improved drug treatments, to exploring new management or care regimes, to finding ways to change community behaviours. They allow us to translate medical science into clinical care, bringing research from the lab and into hospitals. They may also provide patients with early access to new treatments that will not be released to the market for another three to four years.

## Consumer advocacy and partnering with researchers

We are keen to have consumer involvement in our cancer research and we are currently building our consumer partnering program.

## There are many ways to contribute. You can:

- suggest a topic that you would like covered in our Public Lecture series
- request a speaker for your community group or event
- represent the consumer voice on our committees
- partner with our researchers to have a say in their research projects – help us deliver better research programs, better understand the issues that are relevant, and learn how to communicate our research to the community.

Please visit [flinders.edu.au/cancer](http://flinders.edu.au/cancer) or email us at [cancer@flinders.edu.au](mailto:cancer@flinders.edu.au) to get involved or find out more.