

**Thursday, November 27, 2003**

## **Lung cancer patients to be provided support – at last**

A national body for a patient support network is being established for people suffering from lung cancer and their families and carers.

Announced today during Lung Cancer Awareness Month, Associate Professor Kwun Fong, Chairman of the Australian Lung Foundation's Lung Cancer Consultative Group said that for too long, lung cancer had been overlooked and patients suffering from lung cancer had not had the level of support that was necessary.

"Lung cancer is perceived by some to be a 'self-inflicted' disease," Associate Professor Fong said.

"The simple fact is that nobody deserves to suffer from lung cancer.

"For the first time we are aiming to provide lung cancer patients with the type of support, not only for themselves but also for their families and carers, that has been available and helpful for sufferers of many other cancers."

The Lung Cancer Support Group steering group includes representatives from the Australian Lung Foundation, the Global Lung Cancer Coalition, the Cancer Alliance Network, and The Cancer Councils of NSW and Victoria. The group will aim to ensure lung cancer care is well resourced, ensure that the health system delivers patient centred care and provide support to patients, families and carers of people with lung cancer.

Pamela Evans, a non-smoker who has been living with lung cancer for three-and-a-half years said that it is important that lung cancer patients can talk to somebody who is going through the same thing as you.

"The formation of the group is a positive step in the right direction as I have found there to be little support for people like myself," Pamela said.

"Whilst I have been lucky to have the support of close friends, for people who don't, the support group will be of particular benefit, especially if they are very sick.

"Being a non-smoker hasn't made the disease any less aggressive and I think it is about time people's attitudes changed towards the way we treat these patients," Pamela said.

Associate Professor Matthew Peters, Australian representative on the Global Lung Cancer Coalition and Chairman of action on Smoking and Health, said that the Global theme for Lung Cancer Awareness month is that "Nobody in the World Deserves Lung Cancer".

"A necessary precondition to treat lung cancer sufferers well and equitably is to remove all elements of stigma," Associate Professor Peters said.

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"I am excited that the key Australian organisations are pooling their resources to increase support for lung cancer sufferers.

"Those people who are affected with lung cancer should have the community's sympathy and our reassurance that as a community we are doing all we can to find solutions."

Doctors surveyed whilst attending the recent World Congress on Lung Cancer believed that the stigma surrounding lung cancer is a contributing factor as to why people delay seeing their doctor, and that this can result in the cancer being further advanced and less easy to treat.

The Australian Lung Foundation is campaigning to change people's attitudes to this devastating disease which, it hopes, will empower people to go to their doctor earlier and receive treatment earlier, which in turn could slow down the disease and lengthen their lives.

The Foundation is also implementing ways of delivering the latest news and research on lung cancer treatments to ensure health practitioners looking after people with lung cancer have access to the latest evidence.

Associate Professor Peters said people should be aware of the early symptoms of lung cancer and seek a check-up as the prognosis is better for people diagnosed in the early stages of the disease.

Some of the most common symptoms that are linked to lung cancer are:

- coughing
- bloody mucus
- shortness of breath
- pain
- repeated pneumonia or bronchitis
- fatigue
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- hoarseness
- swelling of face and neck
- square swelling of the fingertips

The Lung Cancer Support Group will be officially launched at the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand Annual Scientific Meeting in March 2004. In the meantime, lung cancer patients, family members and carers can find out more by calling: **1800 654 301**.

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Facts:

1. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death, claiming more lives than breast, prostate or colon cancer combined, yet there are fewer treatment options and less funding than many other common cancers.<sup>1</sup>
2. More than 7,000 Australian men and women are diagnosed each year and only 15 per cent are still alive five years after they are diagnosed with the disease.<sup>1</sup>
3. Whilst the majority of people with lung cancer are smokers, many began smoking before the health risks were fully understood and most have heeded health advice and quit smoking before the cancer is diagnosed.<sup>1</sup>
4. However, this association may lead to despondency and a lack of sympathy with people believing it is a self-inflicted disease.<sup>1</sup>

References:

1. The Australian Lung Foundation, *Case Statement Lung Cancer*, April 3, 2003

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