

MEDIA RELEASE

GPs and Dentists Urged to Recognise the Changing Face of Head and Neck Cancer; Vital Support for Newly Diagnosed Head and Neck Cancer Patients

7 March 2023

Today, **Head and Neck Cancer Australia (HANCA)** launched two new resources delivered with the support of the charity's Australian Government funding of \$400,000 received in April 2022 giving people a better chance of early detection and supporting those who are newly diagnosed with Head and Neck Cancer (HNC). The projects were launched at HANCA's first Parliamentary Breakfast at Parliament House in Canberra hosted by Senator Deborah O'Neill, Senator Michaelia Cash and Kylea Tink MP, Co-Chairs of the Parliamentary Friends of Cancer Care and Cure Group.

Project 1: Accredited GP and Dental Education Module There are no screening tests for HNC as there are no technologies currently available that meet the criteria for use in population screening. The earlier these cancers are diagnosed and patients are referred to a specialist for further management the better their outcomes. Patients and HNC clinicians rely on GPs and Dentists to detect these cancers early so it is essential that primary care providers are educated about the red flags of HNC. The module is panelled by **Dr Matthew Magarey**, ENT Head and Neck Surgeon and **Dr Felix Sim**, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon and uses patient case studies to educate participants about the rising incidence of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) related HNC and oral cancers in young women and to know the optimal referral pathways and how to support people newly diagnosed and living with the long-term side effects of HNC.

Head and Neck Cancer Australia Chair, **A/Prof Puma Sundaresan** says, "We are delighted to launch this education module for GPs for Dentists, knowing it will help, through early diagnosis and referral, not only save lives but lessen the brutal impact this disease has on survivors."

"We are incredibly grateful to the GP and Dental representatives, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), Australian Dental Association (ADA), former patients and expert HNC and Oral Medicine clinicians who were all members of our Expert Advisory Committee and helped to inform the content for the module. We couldn't have delivered such an informative and valuable resource without their support and the expertise of the Arterial Education team."

Project 2: [What to Expect Next, \(when newly diagnosed with Head and Neck Cancer\)](#) animated video.

When someone is diagnosed with a type of HNC, they often have never heard of the disease. It is a stressful time and absorbing information from a clinician can be difficult, especially when faced with new terms such as 'multidisciplinary teams' which are so important to HNC.

HANCA worked alongside current and former patients and carers to inform the content and have created a warm and informative animation for patients, carers, friends and family. The animation provides information from diagnosis to treatment to specifics like HPV related cancer and the use of immobilisation masks in radiation therapy, as well as more general topics such as emotional wellbeing and finding support, and ultimately informs people affected by HNC of the reliable information that can be found on the HANCA [website](#).

CEO of Head and Neck Cancer Australia, **Nadia Rosin**, says, "We are very grateful to the Federal Government for listening to our community and acknowledging the changing face of HNC and the unmet needs of people affected by HNC.

"This resource is vital for people commencing their HNC journey who often have no knowledge of the disease and are taken aback by its sinister ability to affect the very essence of their identity including how they speak, eat, swallow and breath and for some people how they look," Nadia said.

The HNC GP and Dental Education Module will be available to all GPs and Dentists in Australia via the **Arterial Education, RACGP, ACCRM, ADA and HANCA websites**. All healthcare professionals can register and enrol in the module and will receive a certificate on completion.

The "What to expect next" animation will be available via the **Head and Neck Cancer website:** www.headandneckcancer.org.au

ENDS

For all media enquiries and interview requests with CEO Nadia Rosin, Chair A/Prof Puma Sundaresan please contact:

Susie Riddell

Communication and Digital Marketing Manager, Head and Neck Cancer Australia

E: Susie@headandneckcancer.org.au

M: 0434 729 230

About Head and Neck Cancer Australia (HANCA)

Head and Neck Cancer Australia is the only national charity dedicated to providing education and support to people living with HNC, their families and carers. We represent over 5,100 people who are newly diagnosed each year and more than 17,000 people who are living with HNC and the family, friends and carers involved in their care.

We also lead the national effort to raise awareness of HNC among all Australians and healthcare professionals to increase early diagnosis and encourage prevention.

About Head and Neck Cancer (HNC)

Over 5,100 people are diagnosed with HNC in Australia every year including three people who are diagnosed with Mouth Cancer each day. HNC includes more than 10 different cancers that can affect a person's mouth, throat, salivary glands, sinuses and skin.

The most important risk factors for HNC are tobacco and alcohol use which are responsible for over 75 per cent of cases. But what people may not know is that the human papilloma virus (HPV), the same virus that causes cervical cancer, is now the most common cause of tonsil and base of tongue cancer. People diagnosed with a HPV related HNC are otherwise healthy and don't smoke or drink to excess but could still be at risk if they haven't had the HPV vaccine. There has also been an alarming 385% increase in tongue cancers in otherwise healthy, young women. The cause is unknown.

Why is HNC different from other cancers?

Treatment for HNC can be brutal, affecting a person's identity unlike any other cancer, and can take away basic abilities that we all take for granted like eating, breathing, speaking, drinking and swallowing. HNC is not a cancer that can be hidden by clothing.

Because of the location of the cancer on such critical functions it takes a team of people to look after someone with HNC. While a surgeon or radiation oncologist is responsible for getting rid of the cancer, recovery can be long and people also rely on a team of specialist nurses, speech pathologists and dietitians to make sure they have the best possible outcomes.

Signs to look out for

As there are currently no screening tests for HNC so all Australians, particularly men, need to be aware of the signs and symptoms and act quickly if they notice something unusual.

Some of the more common causes are an ulcer or sore in your mouth that doesn't heal, a lump in the neck, ear pain or a hoarse voice that isn't related to anything else and you can't explain it.

If you've had any of these symptoms for more than 2-3 weeks it's really important not to ignore them and to get them checked out by your local doctor or dentist as soon as possible. The good news is that when found early Head and Neck Cancers are typically curable. To find out more about the signs and symptoms of HNC visit the [HANCA website](https://www.headandneckcancer.org.au).