



## Media Release

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# Cancer survivors caught-up in ‘fragmented’ system

## Gaps, duplication result in suboptimal follow-up care

Fragmented follow-up care by specialists and GPs, including poor coordination, duplication and inconsistency are compromising the wellbeing of cancer survivors in Australia, according to a leading cancer specialist in an article published today (10 Nov) in the journal *Cancer Forum*.

Associate Professor Michael Jefford, from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Melbourne, described the level of follow-up care of cancer survivors as “inconsistent and fragmented” and that among the issues experienced by survivors was a feeling of “abandonment” by their treatment team.

“Despite the complex issues around treatment completion, survivorship care is suboptimal,” Prof. Jefford wrote. “Follow-up care may be fragmented between oncology specialists (surgeons, medical and radiation oncologists) and general practitioners.”

According to Prof. Jefford, an increasing number of cancer patients are now completing curative treatment, with over 60% per cent surviving more than five years. However, the transition from treatment to the survivorship phase was difficult due to the physical, psychological and social consequences of cancer and treatments. “Survivors are at an increased risk of secondary or recurrent cancers, as well as co-morbidities that affected older populations, such as heart disease and arthritis.”

In particular need of attention were physical and psychosocial late effects. “Patients frequently report ongoing physical issues such as fatigue, pain, urinary/bowel issues and hot flushes, many of which can often be managed with medical interventions or self-care strategies.”

Prof. Jefford said patients were often uncertain about the potential consequences of treatments, which could include physical, psychological, social and practical issues. In addition, strategies to improve wellbeing were rarely discussed and when they were, this was usually ad hoc, inconsistent and lacking a sound evidence base.

Initiatives such as care plans, screening tools, education and training, and development of evidence-based guidelines were crucial to improving care to what was a “vulnerable population”.

The November issue of *Cancer Forum* ([www.cancerforum.org.au](http://www.cancerforum.org.au)) takes an in-depth look at cancer survivorship, covering issues for survivors and caregivers, GP and nurse-led models of care, health behaviour interventions, research, unmet needs and the challenges facing survivors of childhood and adolescent cancers.

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*Cancer Forum* is Australia’s leading cancer journal and one of the world’s few issue-designated cancer review journals, providing the clinical oncological and cancer research communities with multiple in-depth reviews on key aspects of cancer. It is the official journal of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia.