Media Release
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Bowel cancer screening saving lives

Patients diagnosed through screening have higher survival rate

New research released this week confirms that the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is making a major impact on patient survival, further emphasising the importance of eligible Australians participating in the program.

Using data made available through BioGrid Australia, Victorian researchers have shown that patients diagnosed as a result of a positive screening test have a much higher survival rate than patients presenting with symptoms.

Analysis from six Victorian hospitals has shown an increased number of early stage cancers diagnosed via bowel screening. Dr Peter Gibbs and colleagues analysed diagnosis and survival information for 103 patients, none of whom displayed symptoms of bowel cancer, diagnosed as a result of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program between May 2006 and 2012. They compared these to 793 patients of the same age presenting with symptoms over the same timeframe.

Those picked up by screening had a projected five year survival of 95% compared to 73% for patients of the same age who were diagnosed with symptoms.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Ian Olver, said the results further validated the Australian Government’s allocation of an extra $49.7 million in the 2012-13 budget to extend the program to Australians turning 60 from next year, 70-year-olds from 2015, and incrementally adding other eligible age groups over the longer term.

“Fully implemented, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program could save 30 lives a week,” Professor Olver said. “This analysis adds to the current weight of evidence that early detection is key to higher survival rates. It also strengthens the case for encouraging maximum numbers of eligible people to participate in the screening program.”

14,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer every year.

Cancer Council recommends screening every two years for people aged 50 and over. For more information visit www.cancer.org.au or call Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

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