New clinical guidelines for lung cancer treatment

New clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of lung cancer have been published in an electronic ‘wiki’ format to assist doctors and their patients to make informed treatment choices based on the most current research available.

Lung cancer is the fifth most common cancer in Australia, with 9954 new cases (including small cell and non-small cell lung cancers) diagnosed in Australia in 2008. Although survival rates have improved, the five-year relative survival remains relatively low at 14%, highlighting the importance of appropriate referral to multi-disciplinary teams and evidence-based treatment to improve survival outcomes.

The Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Treatment of Lung Cancer, commissioned and co-funded by Cancer Australia and developed by Cancer Council Australia, revise the treatment section of the 2004 “Clinical practice guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis and management of lung cancer”.

The evidence base for the treatment of lung cancer has grown almost exponentially since the 2004 printed guidelines and it continues to grow with emerging research.

Professor David Ball, from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, and Chair of the Lung Cancer Guidelines Working Party, said the web-based electronic format allows editing and updating by expert committees as new evidence becomes available.

“The wiki offers an interactive forum for comment and debate,” he said. “We invite readers who become aware of new evidence to create a personal account and make comments online in the appropriate section, so that the working party can consider whether it should change any of the recommendations. I believe this format is internationally unique and we hope an accessible up-to-date resource for multi-disciplinary teams, individual clinicians, students and consumers.”

Organised according to disease stage, the guidelines cover questions such as:

- What is the role of radiotherapy in the treatment of operable stage I non-small cell lung cancer?
- What is the optimal second-line therapy in patients with extensive stage small cell lung cancer?
- What is the role of palliative care in symptom management for patients with lung cancer?

Further work on the guidelines will continue, with the topics of prevention, screening and diagnosis to be revised and developed next.

The guidelines are available online on Cancer Council Australia’s Cancer Guidelines Wiki: http://wiki.cancer.org.au

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