

MEDIA RELEASE**4 February, 2008****Neurocognitive effects of chemotherapy**

There is growing evidence that some patients who survive cancer can suffer neurocognitive impairment after chemotherapy, explains an article published in the February edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

Although the symptoms are generally subtle and improve after ceasing chemotherapy, for some survivors the symptoms are sustained and can impact significantly on their quality of life.

Janette Vardy, a Medical Oncologist at Sydney Cancer Centre and Concord Repatriation General Hospital says that some studies have reported that 15-50% of patients have cognitive impairment after chemotherapy for solid tumours.

“Areas most affected are usually attention, concentration, verbal and visual memory and processing speed,” explains Dr Vardy.

“The difficulty in determining the true effect of chemotherapy in neurocognitive impairment is the lack of pre-treatment assessment,” adds Dr Vardy. Studies published in the past few years report that up to 30% of patients with solid tumours may have cognitive impairment before receiving chemotherapy.

It is likely that the regimen, dose and duration of chemotherapy influence the incidence and severity of cognitive impairment, writes Dr Vardy. Studies have found higher rates of cognitive dysfunction in patients receiving high doses of chemotherapy compared to those on standard doses.

There are no proven interventions to prevent impairment and the mainstay of therapy is to treat any depression and anxiety. “Once we have insight into the mechanisms that might cause cognitive impairment, strategies for preventing or minimising chemotherapy-induced cognitive impairment can be devised,” added Dr Vardy.

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