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Exercise is the best medicine

Cancer patients from the Macarthur region have a new weapon in their arsenal to fight cancer – the benefits of exercise.

Patients are experiencing better health and wellbeing and improving their chances of survival thanks to two exercise programs offered through the Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre at Campbelltown Hospital.

The ENRICHing Survivorship and the Active Survivor Programs support the recently launched Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) Position Statement on exercise in cancer care.

Dr Diana Adams, Senior Staff Specialist Medical Oncology, at Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre, said the evidence-backed position statement called for exercise to be embedded as part of standard practice in cancer care and built into every treatment plan.

“Exercise can reverse treatment-related side effects, improve muscle mass, stamina, self-esteem and quality of life, and importantly slow the disease’s progression and improve chances of survival.

“I cannot say strongly enough that exercise in cancer care saves lives.

“I am delighted that we are seeing first hand in Macarthur the benefits of exercise in treatment through the Active Survivor and ENRICHing Survivorship programs.”

Cr Warren Morrison, the 24 Hour Fight Against Cancer Macarthur Chairperson, said the local cancer charity organisation provided funds for both programs because of their proven value to patient care.

“The 24 Hour Fight Against Cancer recognises the benefits of the programs and was happy to provide the funding so they can operate in our community and help our patients,” Cr Morrison said.

The ENRICHing Survivorship Program, which is run by the Cancer Council NSW and involves eight two-hour face-to-face weekly sessions, is an exercise and nutrition program for cancer survivors.

The next courses will be held on Fridays from 13 July to 21 August and 21 September to 9 November. Register at 1300 360 541 or email enrich@nswcc.org.au.

The Active Survivor program is a targeted exercise therapy for any cancer patient at any stage of their treatment, offering supervised group exercises led by an exercise physiologist. Patients can join the program at any time.

Patients can start in the Active Survivor Program by Calling (02) 4283 3522.

The NSW Government has committed \$632 million investment to the stage two of the hospital redevelopment, which will include an expanded emergency department, a new paediatric precinct, additional intensive care beds, enhanced mental health services and improvements to ambulatory care and outpatient services.

In addition, the NSW Government is investing \$92.1 million in health and medical research in NSW in 2017-18 through the Office for Health and Medical Research.

The Cancer Institute estimates that over the past five financial years \$22.3 million has been awarded for research programs into childhood cancer.

CASE STUDY

Carolyn Fenwick is a passionate advocate for exercise in cancer care, saying “it's the best thing you can do”.

The retired teacher's aide, 69, of Harrington Park, who was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma three years ago, said including exercise helped during her treatment and recovery, both physically and mentally.

Ms Fenwick took part in the Active Survivor Program at Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre and now exercises regularly at Anytime Fitness.

“I go the gym twice a week and walk regularly as well,” Ms Fenwick said. “When I exercise I feel much better and stronger.

“During my treatment I had chemotherapy and 20 lots of radiation treatment and I don't think I would have recovered as well without doing the exercise.

“My message to people recovering from cancer is to exercise. It is the best thing I ever did.”

Ms Fenwick said exercise also helped boost patients' mental health.

“Sometimes you feel a bit down and when that happens I make sure I go and exercise,” she said.

“It makes you feel better because you are doing something for yourself, being proactive and that really helps.

“I also enjoy the camaraderie of meeting other people recovering from cancer at the gym and we all encourage each other.”

Ms Fenwick encouraged cancer patients to seek more information on exercise and join an exercise program such as the Active Survivor Program.

“The staff involved in the program at the hospital are really encouraging and helped me a lot. I am thankful I took part and now I'm continuing to exercise at the gym,” Ms Fenwick said.

“I really believe in the benefits of exercise in cancer care and for everyone.”