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Patient care at centre of cancer program

The health and wellbeing of cancer patients is at the core of a unique program providing patient-centred care in “real time”.

One of Australia’s leading experts in psycho-oncology has returned to south western Sydney after presenting on PROMPT-Care (Patient Reported Outcomes Measures for Personalised Treatment and Care) at the world’s most prestigious cancer conference.

The American Society of Clinical Oncology invited Professor Afaf Girgis AM to explain in detail how PROMPT-Care allows patients to report their outcomes and their treating team to respond accordingly.

Professor Girgis, the Psycho-Oncology Research Group Director at both Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research and University of NSW, said the program was leading the way in transforming care for cancer patients.

The program captures patient data on quality of life, symptoms and distress levels and provides reports alerting the care team in real-time of any “red-flag” issues. It also sends self-management information to empower the patient to help themselves.

“Our system is fully integrated with the patient medical records and that real-time integration has not been achieved by others in Australia or internationally,” she said.

Data shows patients who are using PROMPT-Care have 26 per cent fewer emergency department presentations; precisely what Professor Girgis was hoping to achieve.

“If we can identify issues early, it helps the care team be informed and respond quickly to address the issues before they escalate, keeping people out of hospital,” Professor Girgis said.

“In our Local Health District alone, the annual costs saved by keeping these patients out of the emergency department could fund a care co-ordinator to manage the program.”

PROMPT-Care is a collaborative initiative between clinicians and researchers from South Western Sydney, Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health Districts. The \$803,000 program was funded by the Cancer Institute of NSW and Bupa Health Foundation.

There are now plans to implement it into routine care and to find ways to reach non-English speaking members of the community.

In addition, cancer centres across Australia have already expressed their interest in implementing the program.

“I’m at a point in my career as a researcher where it’s not about publications and grants but more about how I can influence practice. That’s what I love most about PROMPT-Care,” Professor Girgis said.