



Facing the

challenges of cancer

One in two people in NSW will develop cancer in their lifetime. Its increasing incidence, however, doesn't reduce its complexity or the distress that it causes

With a growing population and an ageing demographic in Sydney's North West, Sydney Adventist Hospital (the SAN) is facing the challenge of providing quality cancer services both now and in the future.

"Sydney Adventist Hospital's aims are simple. We want to achieve the best outcomes for our patients. We want to use the best diagnostic tools, implement the best treatments and provide the best quality care," said Adventist HealthCare Ltd CEO Dr Leon Clark.

Given the San's mission to care for the body, mind and spirit of the community, and the increased incidence of cancer, the San has made cancer a key plank of its healthcare planning.

In addition to the wide range of holistic services provided by the hospital, cancer genetics are also now available.

Cancer genetics

The critical role of cancer genetics was recently highlighted by Angelina Jolie's preventative

The San's redevelopment will also be home to the new \$20 million Integrated Cancer Centre



The San's Clinical Trials Unit



population. If an important gene is not working properly because of an inherited change (mutation) then the risk of certain cancers increase.

“Giving the information about their level of risk and what to do about that risk is really what cancer genetics is all about – powerful information that they can use.”

Clinical trials

The San's Clinical Trials Unit is also playing an important role in the development of new cancer treatments.

A prime example is the unit's clinical trial results from patients requiring bone strengthening medication which has led to Denosumab being administered as the new worldwide standard of care.

“Major advances in cancer outcomes in recent years have largely been through clinical trials and research,” said Associate Professor Gavin Marx, director SAH Cancer Services and the San Clinical Trials Unit.

“This research enables us to push the boundaries of cancer treatment. Having interaction between the Clinical Trials Unit and the team of many doctors reviewing a patient's treatment means our patients get access to drugs that would otherwise not be available to them for many years.”

Cancer treatment related research

Breast cancer navigators Alison Jones and Jenny Crook have recently been involved in research in partnership with Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service and McGrath Breast Nurse Catrina Ross.

The research found that failure to complete recommended breast cancer treatment was up to six times higher in patients with a mental health disorder.

“This research is something that is close to our hearts. It's so difficult to see our patients not completing their treatments,” said Ms Jones.

“We believe an assessment tool for early

THE “ANGELINA EFFECT”

- The “Angelina effect” is the increased interest in cancer genetics
- BRCA1 and BRCA2 are tumor suppressor genes that usually have the job of “spell checking” for mistakes in the DNA in cells
- When a person has one altered or mutated copy of either the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, their risk of certain types of cancer increases significantly
- Only 2% to 10% of cancer is caused by “faulty genes”
- Genetic testing is via a blood sample

double mastectomy after she discovered she had inherited the BRCA1 gene that puts her at significantly increased risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer.

Sydney Cancer Genetics Oncologist Dr Hilda High said there has been a surge of interest in cancer genetics (dubbed the “Angelina effect”), and that the well-known humanitarian actress has done a huge social service.

“There were people [with a family history of cancer] who really needed to be seen and who were putting it off. Now they have a strong role model,” she said.

“It's very important for them to come forward and have the discussion. But it also helps cancer patients who don't have a strong family history. These people have obviously been worrying and it's being able to say ‘your risk is not that high, you don't need any extra screening, you don't need extra surgery’.”

Drawing a family tree or “pedigree” can provide clues as to whether an individual has a higher risk of cancer than the general



The San's Cancer Support Group Leaders

detection of mental health disorders is essential for an effective, holistic approach to breast cancer care," she said.

In addition to wanting to ensure their patients access all the clinical care they need, San breast cancer navigators play a key role in referring patients to additional cancer support services that the San offers.

Support services

The San's Cancer Support Centre, a free community initiative of the hospital that is also open to cancer patients who have received treatment at other public and private facilities, helps patients cope with the physical and emotional challenges of cancer.

It provides a drop-in centre for cancer patients and their carers with access to free resources including information, support groups, access to reflexology and acupuncture treatments, and counsellors.

"Our counsellors try and teach them and empower them - show them how to live until you die, rather than live as though you are dying," said Prue Fairlie, cancer support group facilitator.

Cancer patients and their carers applaud the centre for providing an opportunity to receive support, advice and fellowship, which is critical both during treatment and after, when they are often dealing with survivorship issues.

"You can't unload with your friends and family," says San Cancer Support Centre attendee Lynette Beattie.

"Some don't want to know, others are horrified by it all. Some are just too close and they are afraid of losing you... You don't want to weigh them down with it. You just need fellow travellers to talk to about it, and to be able to say how it is."

"Our counsellors try and teach them and empower them - show them how to live until you die, rather than live as though you are dying"

Studies suggest exercise is associated with a reduced risk of the cancer recurrence and longer survival rates. As a result, exercise is pivotal to the other support services that the San provides through its Physiotherapy Department.

Physiotherapy runs post-breast cancer exercise classes which focus on cardio, posture, core stability and strength to improve bone density and manage weight control.

"Those who do moderate to vigorous exercise reduce their cancer recurrence by 30% to 50%. It's the most important thing we can do for our patients post-cancer," said San Physiotherapist Janet McCormack.

"The class leader is an absolute dynamo who is passionate about health and wellbeing. It's a fantastic physical workout, but there is also a wonderful camaraderie," said Jeanne Liang, post cancer physio participant.

"I have tried other small gyms but it's not the same as having the camaraderie of the girls who have been in the same situation," agreed Lee Bennet, class attendee.

These services, combined with technological advances such as the da Vinci robotic surgical system, are positioning the San to cope with the expected 40% increase of cancer diagnosis by 2020.

The hospital is currently two-thirds of the way through its \$181 million redevelopment to expand its facilities and services.

The expansions allows for 200 new beds, 12 new operating theatres, a maternity and women's health unit, new carpark and arrivals area. The redevelopment also includes the new \$20 million Integrated Cancer Centre - offering easy one-stop access to all cancer diagnostic, treatment and recovery services.

Emerging data and increasing anecdotal evidence suggests that better centralised organisation of cancer patients will improve and save lives.

"Knowing a team is working together on my behalf - not having to second guess advice or wonder if each of the doctors had all the information about me to give me the right advice - that would have been a huge relief when I had my treatment elsewhere," says Jane Ewins, cancer survivor and San Cancer Support Centre volunteer.

The Integrated Cancer Centre is due to be completed by mid-2014. [PH](#)

By Leisa O'Connor