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Patients rate outpatient cancer clinic performance in first-of-its-kind report

Patients in NSW have given NSW outpatient cancer clinics a positive review in a first-of-its-kind report by the Bureau of Health Information and the Cancer Institute NSW.

How do outpatient cancer clinics perform? summarises survey results from more than 3,700 people who visited a NSW outpatient cancer clinic in 2015.

BHI Chief Executive, Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque, said patients were very positive about the care they received overall in outpatient cancer clinics with 99% saying it was either very good or good.

"The report shows 92% of patients said they would speak highly of the clinic to their friends and family. Patients also feel they are being treated with dignity and respect, which is an important aspect of their care," Dr Levesque said.

Chief Cancer Officer and CEO of the Cancer Institute NSW, Professor David Currow, said the report provides a new baseline for measuring the experiences of people with cancer in the NSW public health system.

"We now have first hand insight into the experiences of people with cancer across the state. This information is vital to help us improve cancer services and further ensure people with cancer receive timely and appropriate care, support and information," Professor Currow said.

"Whilst this report paints a largely positive picture of the experiences of people with cancer in the NSW health system, it also offers us the opportunity to identify what we can do better – as reported by those people who matter most: our patients."

Areas of improvement highlighted by the report include complications related to their clinic visit.

"Overall, 12% of patients said they experienced a complication related to their clinic visit, and of these, 15% said the impact of the complication was very serious," Dr Levesque said.

"Ten percent of patients went to an emergency department because of their cancer or complications, which could relate to symptoms and side effects of treatment not being well controlled or that another place to seek medical advice was not available."

The report also shows that patients could be better engaged in their care by health professionals:

- Only three-quarters of patients said they were definitely involved in decisions about their care and treatment, as much as they wanted to be.
- Among patients who needed a cancer care plan and had one, only half said they were definitely asked for their ideas and preferences when developing it.
- Of those who attended a clinic for cancer treatment, patients' confidence in understanding and participating in their own care varied widely across NSW and clinics.

Professor Currow said the report provides new insights into the severity of patients' symptoms, such as anxiety and tiredness, and how they can be used to reflect on clinic performance in NSW.

"Control of symptoms and supporting people in managing their illness are integral parts of good quality care and the report shows that this performance varies widely across NSW and clinics," he said.

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“The Cancer Institute NSW will be working with local cancer services to address the findings of the report and help improve the care of patients with cancer.”

The report, hospital profiles and detailed survey results can be found on the BHI website at bhi.nsw.gov.au

The report is also available on the CINSW website at cancerinstitute.org.au