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# VCCC Head and Neck Cancer Symposium 2021: Intimacy and Sexual Health Symposium

# Date: Tuesday 30 March, 4:30pm-6:00pm

**Overview:**

Head and neck cancer (HNC) and its treatment, including surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy may significantly and permanently impact the sexual health of survivors. Changes in sexual health, including reduced desire, fear of performance and decreased sexual satisfaction have been reported by cancer survivors. Survivors of HNC have also reported poor self-image, increased isolation and disfigurement.

The increasing incidence of human papillomavirus-associated (HPV) oropharyngeal cancers may lead to further challenges in resumption of normal sexual activity and intimacy following treatment, imparting feelings of guilt, resentment or blame within patients and their intimate relationships and may also lead to behavioural changes due to concerns about future HPV transmission. When sexual health problems go unaddressed, survivors can interpret this to mean that sexual dysfunction falls in the category of treatment-related collateral damage that must be endured. Perhaps this is one of the more unfortunate misperceptions that survivors live with – a mistaken understanding that there are no effective treatments for sexual dysfunction after cancer.

In this symposium experts will provide a better understanding of the importance of sexual health to HNC survivors, discuss how HNC and its treatments may impact and alter survivors’ sexual health and intimate relationships, discuss how to address common HPV-related concerns in the clinic and to understand the interventions and referral pathways currently available for treatment related sexual dysfunction.

**Objectives:**

* Contextualise the impact of HNC treatment and its effects on sexual health and intimate relationships among survivors.
* Discuss the importance of sexual health in survivors of HNC.
* Explain the common patient questions about HPV-positive head and neck cancer and provide the knowledge to answer them.
* Discuss existing frameworks for addressing sexual health issues and the opportunities and barriers in implementing strategies to improve intimacy and sexual health after HNC treatment.

**Presenters:**

* **Professor David Wiesenfeld**  
  VCCC Research & Education Lead (HNC), Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Peter MacCallum cancer Centre
* **Dr Lachlan McDowell**  
  Consultant Radiation Oncologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
* **Dr Rachael Dodd**  
  Scientist investigating the psychosocial impacts of cancer diagnoses, University of Sydney
* **Associate Professor Julia Brotherton**  
  Medical Director, National HPV Vaccination Program Register
* **Dr Maria Ftanou**  
  Head of the Clinical Psychology Department, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
* **Nadia Rosin**  
  CEO, Head and Neck Cancer Australia

***Panel discussion - presenters will be joined by:***

* **Professor Jane Hocking**  
  Epidemiologist, University of Melbourne
* **Julie McCrossin**  
  Consumer representative

**Program Outline (subject to change):**

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| **Title** | **Content** | **Presenter(s)** |
| **Setting the scene** | Sexual Health: A multi-dimensional problem | Prof David Wiesenfeld  Dr Lachlan McDowell |
| **Patient perspective** | Impact of HNC treatment on intimate relationships | Julie McCrossin |
| **Impact of HPV in Head and Neck Cancer**  **HNC and sexuality in the era of HPV: common patient questions** | HNC impacts what makes us humans social and intimate  Sexual health outcomes and changes in interpersonal relationships following chemoradiation for HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancer – *a cross sectional study*  Common questions that patients and clinicians ask about HPV-related head and neck cancer | Dr Rachael Dodd  Dr Lachlan McDowell  Assoc Prof Julia Brotherton |
| **Approaches to interventions and management strategies of sexual dysfunction in HNC** | Understand psychosocial interventions to support sexual health in patients with HNC | Dr Maria Ftanou |
| **Overview of Head and Neck Cancer Australia** | Overview of activities and the information on offer to support patients and carers living with HNC | Nadia Rosin |
| **Panel Discussion** | **Sexual health in HNC: a multidisciplinary problem** | Presenters joined by:  Julie McCrossin  Prof Jane Hocking |
| **Conclusion** | Summary and close | Prof David Wiesenfeld  Dr Lachlan McDowell |