



5th November 2015

Statement for the NZ Herald - Key Lung Cancer Issues in New Zealand

November is Lung Health Awareness Month and November 17th is International Lung Cancer Awareness Day.

The newly formed NGO Lung Foundation NZ, is convening a Lung Health Seminar on November 11th which will highlight four key messages to advocate for healthy lungs:

- Lung disease can affect anyone regardless of age, ethnicity, health or socioeconomic status.
- Symptoms such as shortness of breath, cough, chest pain and wheeze are not normal and should be checked by your GP.
Lung Foundation NZ will advocate to ensure all New Zealanders and all GP's recognize these signs should be investigated.
- The earlier you treat lung disease the better.
- Don't smoke, and exercise.

The recently appointed Medical Director of Lung Foundation NZ, Assoc Prof Chris Atkinson says "Lung cancer is a major killer of New Zealanders with 1600 dying each year and almost 2000 new cases each year, but lung cancer lacks the profile of many other cancers.

It is also a major cause of disparity of health outcomes between Maori and non-Maori, as lung cancer rates are four times higher in Maori women and two and a half times higher in Maori men. Smoking rates among Maori women are some of the highest in the Western World.

It is essential that we grapple with smoke cessation as cigarette smoking remains the major risk for the development of lung cancer, but lung cancer also occurs in non-smokers who then also suffer the stigma that "they must have brought the cancer on themselves".

Smokers are victims of nicotine addiction - it is the cigarette manufacturers who cause these potentially fatal lung health issues."

There is an increasing trend for the care plan of all patients with lung cancer to be discussed at a multidisciplinary team meeting, but too many patients are diagnosed with advanced disease which has spread beyond where high quality local treatments such as surgery or radiation treatment could potentially cure.

Lung Foundation NZ will advocate for making innovative medicines for lung cancer available to all New Zealanders by working with Government, PHARMAC and pharmaceutical companies.

"We want lung cancer diagnosed early by investigation of symptoms, rather than when the patient is coughing up blood in the Emergency Room" Chris Atkinson explains.



Lung Foundation New Zealand supports the Smoke Free Coalition initiative to have New Zealand smoke free by 2025.

In the interim, stop smoking or don't start and recognize symptoms and have them investigated by your family doctor early.

Ends

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Associate Professor Chris Atkinson is a Christchurch based Oncologist currently working at the St George's Cancer Care Centre.

He trained in Christchurch, Toronto (Canada) and London (UK).

He has held many cancer related non clinical roles including being a former President and Medical Director of the Cancer Society of NZ, former Chair of Cancer control NZ and former President of NZ Society for Oncology, Psycho-Oncology NZ and the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group.

He was the Inaugural Dean of the Faculty Radiation Oncology (FRO), Royal Australian and NZ College of Radiologists, and is currently still on the FRO Council representing New Zealand.

He was awarded the Companion NZ Order of Merit (CNZM) in the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours for Services to Cancer Care.