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National Lung Cancer Screening Programme Could Save Kiwi Lives - Experts

According to the latest annual figures from the Ministry of Health more than 2270³ Kiwis were diagnosed with lung cancer and over 1800 died⁴.

Data from the NELSON study which was presented at last year's International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer (IASLC) World Conference on Lung Cancer showed that low dose computed tomography (CT) screening in a high risk population of smokers and former smokers can reduce death from lung cancer by 26% in men and up to 61% in women¹.

Computed tomography is an imaging procedure that uses narrow beam x-rays to create detailed cross sectional scans of areas inside the body. The NELSON study used low-dose CT screening and with over 15,000 participants is the largest trial of its kind in Europe.¹

The findings of this study support results of the earlier National Lung Cancer Screening Trial (NLST) from the United States⁵, and have lead the IASLC to call on "international leaders, governments, health care systems and other stakeholders to implement global lung cancer screening programs, as they do for breast cancer (mammography) and colon cancer (colonoscopy), which save the lives of countless individuals."⁶

Associate Professor of Oncology and Lung Foundation New Zealand Medical Director, Chris Atkinson says the earlier lung cancer is diagnosed, the better the treatment outcome is likely to be, particularly if it is identified before it has spread to the lymph nodes, or other parts of the body.

"There are two main types of lung cancer – non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), which makes up 85% of lung cancer cases⁷ and, small cell lung cancer (SCLC).

"Surgery may be an effective treatment for early stage lung cancer but is limited to tumours that have not spread beyond the lungs," he says.

Dr Greg Frazer, respiratory physician and member of Lung Foundation NZ's Special Advisory Committee, which is an affiliate of the IASLC, says the introduction of a lung cancer screening programme has the potential to improve health outcomes in New Zealand.

"Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer death in New Zealand.⁴ While there are still a number of questions to be answered and challenges to be overcome to introduce an effective screening programme in New Zealand, Lung Foundation New Zealand (LFNZ) looks forward to working with government, DHBs and other advocacy groups in order to reduce the burden of lung cancer in our communities."

"Early detection increases the chances of cure in people with lung cancer, so again we urge anyone with symptoms such as persisting breathlessness or cough (particularly if coughing blood), unexplained weight loss, chest pain, or recurring chest infections to see their GP or health provider as soon as possible, as these may be symptoms of lung cancer," he says.



Lung Foundation CEO, Philip Hope says the disease can affect anyone, including non-smokers, and more needs to be done to support those living with lung cancer in NZ.

“Unfortunately when it comes to treating lung cancer with medication, New Zealand lags behind the majority of OECD countries with its funding of next generation treatment options in the public health system.”

“There are significant advances in the development of targeted therapies and immunotherapy medications including the most recent one to enter the NZ market alectinib; which has been shown to decrease the risk of progression or death in patients with a form of the disease called anaplastic lymphoma kinase (ALK) positive non-small-cell lung cancer, by 53%.⁸”

“These treatments have less toxicity than chemotherapy and significantly improve survival rates, giving patients more time with their families - particularly if the disease is caught earlier,” he says.

- Ends -

Written by Impact PR. For more information, contact Mark Devlin mark@impactpr.co.nz 021 509060

References

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2. De Koning H, et al. Effects of volume CT lung cancer screening: mortality results of the NELSON randomised-controlled population based trial. J Thoracic Oncol 2018;13(10) Suppl: S185. Abstract PL02.05 presented at the IASLC 19th World Conference on Lung Cancer, 23-26 September 2018. Toronto, Canada.
3. Ministry of Health. Selected Cancers 2014, 2015, 2016. 30 April 2018. Available from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/selected-cancers-2014-2015-2016>. Accessed: November 2018.

About lung cancer

Lung cancer is New Zealand’s biggest cancer killer. 5 Kiwis every day (Five times the national road toll). Lung cancer kills more kiwis than; breast cancer, prostate cancer and melanoma combined.

Lung cancer does not discriminate - even healthy people can develop lung cancer. In fact one in five patients have never smoked and only 30% of patients diagnosed with lung cancer smoke at the time of diagnosis. Lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death for men aged 45 - 74 years and women aged 65 - 74 years. Lung cancer represents one of the largest health inequalities in NZ with markedly poorer outcomes for Maori and Pacifica compared to Pakeha New Zealanders. There is 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 nearly three times higher in Maori men.



Lung Foundation NZ - new lung cancer resources launched

Subsequent to the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer (IASLC) World Conference on Lung Cancer held last September in Toronto, Canada, Lung Foundation has launched two important resources, the first, promotes early detection; **Lung Cancer BREATHE poster - Know your symptoms**

<https://lungfoundation.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LFNZ-BREATHE-A4-Poster-WEB.pdf>

And the second; **“Lung Cancer Patient Toolkit”** is designed to empower patients and carers to navigate their cancer journey and make informed treatment decisions. *This resource also links to a peer support group, aptly named; Lung Cancer Patient Group NZ*

<https://lungfoundation.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LFNZ-TOOLKIT-A4-Poster.pdf>

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