

Background and Aim:

- The post-treatment survivorship period presents unique challenges for head and neck cancer (HNC) patients transitioning from acute care.
- Complex treatments often result in physical and psychosocial unmet needs, influenced by factors like culture, socio-economic status, and location.
- Urban residents generally have better access to healthcare, whereas rural populations face restricted access, complicating survivorship care.
- This study aims to identify the unmet survivorship needs and healthcare utilisation of HNC patients in rural New South Wales (NSW).

Materials and methods

- Eligibility Criteria:
 - Aged 18 years and older.
 - Lived in regional or remote areas of NSW
 - Had been diagnosed with HNC (excluding cutaneous and thyroid cancers) and at any point in their survivorship phase.
- Procedure:
This cross-sectional study was conducted across multiple tertiary cancer institutions from July 2023 to January 2024.
- Measures: Cancer survivor unmet needs (CaSUN) measure, investigator-designed health utilisation questionnaire

Results

- 116 patients completed the questionnaire (Mean age = 70.1 years)
- Gender Distribution: Males = 65%; Females = 35%
- Over half of the patients had oropharyngeal cancer (n=61)
- Inner Regional participants (n=107; 92.2%).

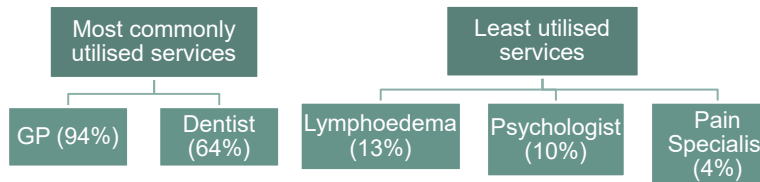
UNMET NEEDS:

Two-thirds of participants reported at least one need.

Half of the participants had one unmet need.

TOP UNMET NEEDS	
Fear of cancer recurrence	25%
Financial support	15%
Availability of local health services	15%
Access to complementary health services	15%

HEALTHCARE UTILISATION:



OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES:

- Not being well informed about psychosocial support
- Distance and Travel Burden



Conclusions

1. Rural HNC survivors face substantial unmet psychosocial needs, and yet demonstrate low utilisation of professional psychosocial support.
2. This highlights a potential service gap or accessibility challenges
3. These gaps could be addressed with shared models of care that utilise both GP-led and telehealth services to address psychosocial concerns in rural settings.

Reference:

Bhatia, S., et al., Rural-Urban Disparities in Cancer Outcomes: Opportunities for Future Research. JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, 2022. 114(7): p. 940-952.

Further information

Dr Poorva Pradhan

poorva.pradhan@lh.org.au



@PoorvaPradhan