

Helping lung cancer sufferers self-manage breathlessness

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(Medical Xpress)—Breathlessness is one of the most distressing symptoms of lung cancer for both the patients and their carers, but QUT researchers are developing techniques to help patients effectively manage it themselves, and help ease their fear and anxiety.

Lung cancer is the fourth most common cancer in Australia and accounts for the most cancer deaths in Australia at a rate nearly 50 per cent higher than all other cancer deaths.

PhD student at IHBI's Supportive and Palliative Care Research Group Vanessa Brunelli said [breathlessness](#) added substantially to a patient's discomfort and distress and affected their quality of life.

"I see the effects of breathlessness firsthand in the patients I nurse. It causes great fear in patients and carers feel very helpless," she said.

"We recently tested a range of techniques and approaches that patients and carers can do at home that work without the use of drugs to alleviate the effects of breathlessness."

In collaboration with Professor Patsy Yates, the breathlessness research focused on non-pharmaceutical techniques such as relaxation and visualisation exercises, modifying the patient's [home environment](#) and identifying ways to "pace" themselves according to their activity needs and [energy level](#).

"We trialled the suite of techniques in more than 100 [lung cancer](#) patients in Queensland and found improved ratings of breathlessness, improved perceptions of control over breathlessness and greater reduction in anxiety" Ms Brunelli said.

"We encouraged patients to get to know their limits but stay active. If, when hanging out their washing they become breathless, for example, they might need to lower the clothes line, use an indoor clothes airer, or look at changing their daily activities, such as doing their washing in the mornings when they have the most energy."

Ms Brunelli is now developing a training program for specialist cancer nurses to assist primary care and community nurses to support breathless [lung cancer patients](#) and their carers in breathlessness self-management techniques.

"The aim is for nurses who support patients and carers in their home to be able to integrate these techniques for breathlessness self-management into their routine daily life, providing effective symptom relief and comfort," she said.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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