

Investigating how rural families cope with cancer

May 12 2016, by Robyn Mills

A University of Adelaide study is investigating how rural families cope in the wake of a cancer diagnosis, particularly how they manage the various financial, social, practical and emotional issues that arise.

The researchers are hoping to hear from rural South Australian families who have had a family member diagnosed with cancer in the past three years. They specifically want to hear from family units where the diagnosed parent has dependant children under 18.

The study will be carried out by Psychology Honours student Eleanor Garrard, under the supervision of Professor Carlene Wilson and Dr Kate Fennell. Eleanor grew up in the country town of Loxton, and hopes that this research will enable her to 'give back' to [rural communities](#) throughout the state.

"Members of rural communities are acutely aware of the disadvantages associated with living a great distance from a metropolitan centre," Eleanor says.

"A diagnosis of cancer often represents a significant crisis for patients and their families. But for those who live in rural areas, the impact of this diagnosis can be made much worse by the added strain of having to undertake extensive travel to receive specialised medical care, and the associated financial burdens and family separation.

"These disadvantages can have a significant negative impact on the

patient's physical and mental wellbeing."

While a growing body of research is endeavouring to understand the unique needs of rural cancer patients, very little is known about how the families of rural cancer patients adjust and adapt to the diagnosis and treatment demands.

Eleanor's project aims to identify strategies that rural families adopt to manage the cancer experience, as well as the community and family based support outlets that are most valued. She hopes this research will help determine practical interventions specifically targeted to assist rural families in coping with a [cancer diagnosis](#).

"The primary focus of this study will be to simply understand what strategies best enable families to maintain a balance of physical, mental and emotional health in the wake of a [cancer diagnosis](#)," she says.

Participation in this study involves the completion of a questionnaire, which should take no longer than 20 minutes. Following the questionnaire, some families will be invited to partake in a [family](#) focus group interview that is expected to take no longer than 60 minutes. These will be carried out in [rural areas](#).

More information: To participate in the study, please contact Eleanor on eleanor.garrard@student.adelaide.edu.au

Provided by University of Adelaide

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