



CANCER CAN HAVE A SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL IMPACT

Cancer patients call for automatic entitlement to medical cards to alleviate hardship

CANCER can have a major financial impact on newly diagnosed patients, cancer survivors and their families. This was the overall finding of a qualitative study which examined the extra expenses incurred by cancer patients and the consequences of those on a wider family across Ireland, conducted by the National Cancer Registry of Ireland (NCRI) and funded by the Irish Cancer Society. The results of this study, the first of its kind in Ireland, are being presented at the National Cancer Research Institute conference in Birmingham today.

The key results of the study showed that substantial groups of cancer patients are especially vulnerable. These include some patients in a variety of circumstances including patients with little family support, elderly patients, patients with young children, 'working age' patients, lone parents, younger patients, self employed patients, patients living alone, patients in rural areas and farmers.

Speaking on the results of the study, Aileen Timmons, Study Co-ordinator, National Cancer Registry of Ireland said "Up until now little has been known about the financial impact of a cancer diagnosis but this study has really helped our understanding."

The results of this study showed that as a result of a cancer diagnosis, additional expenses arise because of;

- The necessity to stop work during treatment and illness
- Limited availability of sick pay
- Decreased income
- Ineligibility for benefits and allowances (cancer patients do not have an automatic entitlement to medical cards)
- Additional expenses experienced also include treatment related extra expenses such as;
- Transport, parking over-night accommodation and meals
- Increased heating and fuel bills, phone bills, clothes, healthy food
- Wigs, over-the-counter medicines, GP visits, complementary therapies
- Child care, home help and convalescence

Participants in the study also made several recommendations to minimise patient hardship and improve services. Primarily participants in the study feel that there should be an automatic entitlement to a medical card for cancer patients for the duration of the illness and that there should be a fast tracked application for medical cards for cancer patients. In addition participants feel that there should be designated trained Community Welfare Officers in hospitals to deal with cancer patients.

Also speaking on the results of the study, John McCormack, Chief Executive of the Irish Cancer Society said "Our plan now is to review the current benefits situation for cancer patients in Ireland, the results of this study and to make recommendations to the Department of Health and Children to help alleviate the financial burden on cancer patients and their families."

The study conducted from December 2006 to August 2007 comprised two sets of interviews with 21 Oncology Social Workers, working across 11 hospitals and 21 cancer patients, who were treated at 8 hospitals across the country.

For further information and/or to organisation an interview with a member of the 'Financial Impact of a Cancer Diagnosis' study group, please contact Jane Curtin, Communications Manager, Irish Cancer Society Tel.: +353 87 938 0779

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's premier forum for disseminating advances across all aspects of cancer research.

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.