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Full Reference: Pradhan P, Sharman A, Judith L, Dwyer P, Hill J, Davis KJ, Craig S, Wu R, Ashford A, Mitchell J, Clark JR, Elliott MS, Palme CE, Venchiarutti RL. *Health care utilisation and unmet needs in survivors of head and neck cancer in regional/remote Australia: a cross-sectional survey.*

Conference/Meeting Name: International Psycho-oncology Society (IPOS) Conference

Location: Maastricht, The Netherlands

Dates: 24th-27th September 2024

Presentation Type: Oral



The International Psycho-oncology Society (IPOS) 2024 World Congress is a premier international gathering focused on integrating psychosocial care into comprehensive cancer treatment. This year's event, themed "Cancer in Context" highlighted the need to consider personal and social factors affecting the cancer experience. The congress brought together a diverse group of professionals—including psychologists, physicians, nurses, social workers, patient advocates, and researchers—from around the world, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Key speakers included:

- Dr. José Custers from Radboud University Medical Centre (Netherlands) who researches psychological mechanisms like "fear of disease progression," linking theoretical work with practical interventions.
- Dr. Wendy WT Lam, IPOS President and head of the Division of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Hong Kong, leads research on cancer survivorship.
- Prof. Dr. Marije van der Lee of Tilburg University and the Helen Dowling Institute in the Netherlands combines clinical work with research on personalized care, using eHealth methods for chronic cancer-related fatigue and fear of cancer recurrence.
- Dr. Sophie Lebel, recipient of the Bernie Fox Memorial Award, is known for the FORT intervention on fear of cancer recurrence, now being adapted internationally and for caregivers and parents of paediatric survivors.

This year's congress generated notable "buzz" around eHealth interventions and fear of cancer recurrence (FCR), with many sessions showcasing these areas' potential to improve access to psychosocial care.

Attending the IPOS conference was an enriching experience that deepened my knowledge in psycho-oncology, particularly regarding FCR and the role of eHealth interventions. Key takeaways included recent evidence on how digital tools can enhance access to mental health support for people living with and beyond cancer, and insights into tailoring interventions to specific patient needs. I also had the opportunity to network with international experts, which opened potential avenues for collaboration. For instance, discussions with Dr. Marije van der Lee and her work on personalized eHealth solutions inspired ideas for integrating these approaches into my research on rural survivorship care.

The insights I gained from the IPOS conference, especially around recent advancements in managing FCR, will significantly enhance my current research on supporting people with head and neck cancer (HNC). Learning about innovative FCR interventions from leaders like Dr. Sophie Lebel has provided practical approaches for addressing FCR, with digital tools that can increase accessibility, particularly for rural or underserved populations. I am currently writing a research protocol for an intervention to manage FCR

My research on FCR and psychosocial support for people with HNC is highly relevant to Sydney Cancer Partners, particularly in translational cancer research and patient care. By evaluating low-cost and minimal interventions like Cognitive Bias Modification for Interpretation (CBM-I), my work offers scalable solutions to address psychosocial needs, improving survivor quality of life and integrating mental health into routine cancer care. The findings on unmet needs in rural areas highlight gaps in current services, offering valuable insights for policy and service improvements.

A personal highlight for me was presenting my research at the IPOS 2024 conference, where I had the opportunity to share my findings on the unmet psychosocial needs of head and neck cancer survivors in regional and remote New South Wales. It was incredibly rewarding to see the impact of my work resonate with others in the field, especially as it highlighted the challenges faced by rural populations in accessing psychosocial support. This experience reaffirmed my commitment to addressing these gaps and advancing psychosocial care for cancer survivors.