

# The lived experience of being diagnosed and treated for lung cancer in the outpatient departments of an acute care hospital: a psychosocial phenomenological study.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Nursing Science (Oncology Nursing).

University of Adelaide, School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences

Submitted: 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014

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# Signed Statement

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the School of Nursing Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

# Acknowledgements

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- Thank you to the participants for donating their time and giving many rich insights into their lung cancer experience.
- Supervisor and associate researcher: Dr David Foley: BSc, RN, A&E Cert, MNS, PhD, and University of Adelaide School of Nursing Lecturer, for believing that the topic was worth doing, always being available, constant positivity and practical writing advice.
- Clinical sponsor and associate researcher: Dr Phan Nguyen: MBBS, PhD, FRACP; Thoracic Physician, Thoracic Medicine, Royal Adelaide Hospital, for dedication to improving the care of lung cancer patients through innovating a rapid triage clinic for referrals, expert diagnostic procedural skills, assistance with ethics application, writing skills and recruitment of participants.
- Clinical sponsor and associate researcher: Dr Peter Robinson: Thoracic Physician, MBBS, FRACP; Head of Thoracic Procedures and Lung Cancer, Thoracic medicine Royal Adelaide Hospital for clinical sponsorship, intellectual input, expert diagnostic procedural skills, patient recruitment and constant support for the advanced lung cancer nurse role.
- Thoracic nurses of the Thoracic Medicine Outpatient department: for always supporting the role of the lung cancer support nurse; continued dedication to the care of lung cancer patients and assisting with patients during the research process.
- My family for their continuous support.
- The Multidisciplinary Lung Cancer Team and the staff of Thoracic Medicine, Cardiothoracic Surgical Unit, Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, Social Work, Clinical Psychology, Emergency Department and Palliative Care Services of the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

# Abstract

## Aim

The aim of this project was to research participants' lived experiences of being diagnosed and treated for lung cancer in the outpatient departments of an acute care hospital, particularly in relation to whether they reported lung cancer related psychosocial distress and secondly to analyse whether the participants felt that they had received appropriate psychosocial care from the hospital staff.

## Background

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death worldwide with only 12% of people diagnosed surviving for more than five years beyond their diagnosis and few surviving for more than one year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011). Consequently, receiving a lung cancer diagnosis is a source of high emotional and psychosocial distress, which research suggests, is often not detected or treated by health professionals with appropriate levels of supportive care. More research is needed to identify the barriers that exist in the outpatient setting, particularly from the patients' perspective, which undermine best practice psychosocial care.

## Methods

The fundamental position of phenomenological research is that human understanding is only accessible through inner subjectivity and that each person and their understandings are inseparable from the context of their environment. This approach allows open expression and exploration of patients' lung cancer experience within the health care context. For this study, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology has been used for its interpretive approach, as it allows the researcher to use theories, knowledge and pre-understanding when interpreting the participants' subjective experience.

## Results

A very high level of unrelieved psychosocial distress and concern was expressed by some of the participants with late stage lung cancer and most participants, regardless of stage, reported ongoing fear of recurrence. Some evidence of barriers which prevent supportive care from occurring became apparent. The findings developed during the research included some simple health care approaches that practitioners can adopt in order to help reduce the psychosocial distress of this group of people. These include ensuring continuity of care, improving empathetic communications, early referral and reflection on professional attitudes. It is hoped that this research will improve understanding and empathy for lung cancer patients, so that detection and treatment of psychosocial distress can be improved.