

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## Sexuality and Intimacy after cancer

**Professor Jane Ussher, Dr Janette Perz and Dr Emilee Gilbert from the School of Psychology are collaborating with a multi-disciplinary team comprised of Ms Gillian Batt and Dr Kendra Sundquist from the Cancer Council of NSW (CCNSW), Ms Sue Carrick from the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF), Dr Gerard Wain and Ms Kim Hobbs from Westmead Hospital, and Dr Laura Kirsten from Nepean Hospital, to explore the effect of cancer and cancer treatments on sexuality and intimacy in relationships through an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant.**

'Sexuality and intimacy are key aspects of an individual's quality of life and these can be detrimentally affected by cancer' says Professor Ussher. 'Significant proportions of couples report that physical intimacy and sexual contact stops or is reduced after cancer, resulting in considerable distress. However, sexuality is rarely addressed by health professionals, and remains largely invisible within policy and practice guidelines developed to improve the quality of life of people with cancer and their partners. Current knowledge about sexuality and intimacy post-cancer is also restricted by a focus on a limited range of cancer types, blindness to the experiences of partners, and a limited range of methodologies in research studies of the issue.'

Working closely with policy makers, health professionals, cancer patients and community through partner organisations Westmead Hospital, Nepean Hospital, CCNSW, NBCF and the National Prostate Cancer Foundation, the investigators will conduct questionnaires and interviews to examine the nature and consequences of changes in sexuality and intimacy post-cancer. This will highlight commonalities and differences between



groups affected by different types of cancer and inform programs of prevention and intervention.

Through developing programs to facilitate re-negotiation of sexuality and intimacy, post cancer, and evaluating the effectiveness of these programs in a randomised controlled trial, this project will provide people living with cancer, and their families with improved quality of life. The partner organisations will gain insight into ways to improve their services, and vital information to allow more focussed policies and programs to assist cancer patients and their families to negotiate matter affecting their intimate relationships.

**Project Title:** Multiple perspectives on sexuality and intimacy post-cancer, leading to the development and evaluation of supportive interventions

**Funding has been set at:** \$586,624

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**April 2009**