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# COVID-19 and the Cancer Care Workforce

Initiative Type

Service Improvement

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Deliver

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## Summary

This project was developed by Metro North Hospital and Health Service (MNHHS) to document the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on all cancer care frontline healthcare workers, including ancillary workers such as hospital cleaners and food delivery services.

This body of research explored the impact of working in healthcare during the pandemic within the

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context of low infection rates. The study aims to evaluate the psychosocial impacts on all staff in the cancer care service.

It is believed to be one of the first projects of its kind worldwide.

### Key dates

Mar 2020

Oct 2020

### Implementation sites

Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Sunshine Coast University Hospital

### Partnerships

Metro Noth HHS and Sunshine Coast HHS

## Key Contacts

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## **Aim**

- to explore and document the full psychosocial impact of COVID-19 prospectively
- to include all staff with patient facing roles (who were integral in service delivery) as a world's first research project
- to explore the humanistic aspect of all staff and their sacrifices paired with their coping skills of distress during the pandemic, not just as hospital workers, but as parents, daughters, sons, and as members of the broader society.

## **Benefits**

We have been able to raise global awareness about the impact of COVID-19 in Australia in the context of low local infection rates and will use the research to develop inclusive policies for all frontline staff, and better prepare health services to maintain a positive culture and staff mental health in a time of crisis.

## **Background**

The psychological impact of COVID-19 on all cancer care staff was unknown. As a result, Metro North HHS developed arguably the world's first quality and service initiative to document the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on all cancer care staff, including ancillary workers such as hospital cleaners.

## **Solutions Implemented**

Results will inform policy and practice and prepare for psychosocial interventions necessary for all cancer care staff. We have successfully documented the distress suffered by the entire team from doctors, nurses, and allied health to outpatient administrative staff and cleaners. A key solution is to be inclusive of these staff when implementing staff supports in a future disaster such as a pandemic.

## **Evaluation and Results**

- We have been invited to present our study findings at two key Metro North Leadership Operations Executive Meetings. Attendees were leaders of all clinical streams.
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- We have been awarded the inaugural Dr Stephen Morrison Clinical Research Award at the inaugural Herston Health Precinct Symposium in 2020 for Best Oral Abstract for Innovative Health Service Delivery.
  - Our work has been presented in multiple international and national conferences and we have published three manuscripts to date in international scientific journals, with multiple more manuscripts under preparation.

## **Lessons Learnt**

In the context of low local COVID-19 infection rates, oncology staff - regardless of role and geographic setting - reported high perceptions of institutional preparedness. Distress levels increased concurrently with lockdown phases and reports of distress and psychosocial workload fatigue were made by various workers including administrative and ancillary.

These should be considered for workplace psychosocial support for frontline staff during pandemic responses.

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