Social Work

Social Workers are trained in the assessment of the person in their total environment and the development of intervention strategies to maximise their well-being. We are involved both in assisting people to develop and use their own inner strengths, and also in mobilising community resources to support the person/family where needed. We can also advocate for you in navigating the medical system that may sometimes appear intimidating and highly technical.

In Oncology

Cancer can affect any person at any point in their life. By nature, it is unpredictable. It differs from other chronic illnesses in that it generally evokes our deepest fears about death and the meaning of life. People newly diagnosed with cancer often appreciate some information and some extra support to deal with the news. Family roles often need to change to allow for the impact of illness. Social workers may intervene to clarify communication between family members or between patient and the medical team. There are a wide range of community services available to assist in times of illness. The social worker will link you with appropriate services as required.

When should I see a social worker?

• Emotional distress following a new diagnosis or diagnosis of a recurrence
• Financial difficulties
• Concerns about talking to the children or how they are faring
• Concerns about how the family is coping with the diagnosis
• Body image concerns
• Communication/relationship concerns following the diagnosis
• Wanting support in dealing with the illness at any stage
• “Survivorship” issues post-treatment
• Grief counselling
• Support for family members
• Practical welfare needs

How to contact the Social Workers

Phone 4226 7814 or 4226 9753. Please leave a message if unavailable.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapists assist people to maximise their function and independence in all daily activities.

Occupational Therapy Services Provided:

• Equipment recommendation for the hospital inpatients
• Prescription and education regarding appropriate use and maintenance of equipment
• Home assessment to provide recommendations for home modifications, to assess for services and equipment.
• Liaison with the patient and carer/s in relation to home management and the impact of illness.
• Education for the patient/carer on energy conservation and work simplification; and correct lifting and handling techniques.
• Lymphoedema assessment and treatment

Lymphoedema Service

Certain patients may be at risk of a condition called “lymphoedema”.

Symptoms of lymphoedema include the following:

• Swelling (particularly of a limb or in the head/neck region)
• Feeling of skin tightness (stretching)

It is important to check any symptoms as soon as possible. If a diagnosis of lymphoedema is made, assessment and treatment should be sought early to prevent progression.

Do I need a referral?

The OT Department accepts referrals from any Cairns Base Hospital staff members or your GP. The OT requires a doctor’s referral for lymphoedema treatment.

How to contact the Occupational Therapist

Phone: 4226 6330

Pharmacy

The Oncology Unit has a dedicated Pharmacist and Technician to ensure that your treatment is provided under strict safety guidelines.

The Pharmacist checks all treatment regimens and doses to make sure that they are safe and appropriate for you.

The Pharmacist is also available to answer any questions you may have on your current treatment plan such as side-effects, dose information or if there are any interactions with any medication you currently take. It is important to fill out your medication history at the front of your treatment diary and include any herbal and alternative therapies. We recommend that if you wish to take any new alternative therapies that you check the safety of them with the pharmacist or consultant to ensure that they are compatible with your treatment.

How to contact the Pharmacy

Phone: 4226 6850
**Dietitian**

What is a Dietitian?
Dietitians are university-qualified consultants in nutrition and dietetics. They have the skills and training to provide food and nutrition advice to meet individual health and lifestyle needs.

What’s the difference between a Dietitian and a Nutritionist?
A ‘Nutritionist’ is a qualified nutrition scientist or a self-professed nutrition adviser. All dietitians can call themselves nutritionists if they choose because they have University qualifications in nutrition. These qualifications generally consist of a four year health science degree or a two year post-graduate Masters degree in nutrition and dietetics. As well as being qualified to advise individuals and groups on nutrition-related matters, dietitians have the clinical training to modify diets to treat disease conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, gastrointestinal disease, cancer and food allergy.

Why should I see a Dietitian?
You should ask to see the Oncology Dietitian if you:
- Have lost weight without trying
- Gained weight
- Are fatigued and have difficulty with meal preparation
- Have a sore mouth and throat
- Don’t feel like or have difficulty eating during treatment
- Suffer diarrhoea or constipation
- Have lost your taste or have taste changes
- Suffer nausea
- Suffer diarrhoea or constipation
- Have high cholesterol or insulin resistance
- A desire to learn more about nutrition

Do I need a referral?
No, you can request to see the Dietitian without a referral.

How to contact the Dietitian
Phone 4226 7813. Please leave a message if unavailable.

**Clinical and Health Psychology Services**

Psychologists are experts in human behaviour. Most psychologists help mentally healthy people to find ways of functioning better. Psychologists usually work in community settings, but some work in hospitals. In the Oncology and Haematology Service, the Psychologist helps people manage the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of their illness.

What is the Difference between a Psychologist and a Psychiatrist?
Psychiatrists have a medical degree and postgraduate training in mental illnesses. They prescribe medications and provide psychotherapy. Psychologists have a behavioural science degree and postgraduate training in speciality areas such as clinical or health psychology. They provide psychotherapy, counselling, and psychometric assessments.

Clinical Psychology Services Provided
- Assessment and treatment of difficulties with mood such as depression, grief, anger and adjustment
- Assessment and treatment of fears, phobias, anxiety, panic, stress and trauma

Health Psychology Services
- Pain management (relaxation strategies, activity pacing, cognitive restructuring)
- Other symptom management (fatigue, disrupted sleep, food aversion). Involves psycho-education, activity pacing, cognitive and behavioural techniques.
- Health behaviour change (assists patients who are struggling to comply with recommendations made by other health professionals to take medication, lose weight, stop smoking, increase exercise, reduce alcohol consumption, etc.)
- Chronic condition self-management
- Goal setting / structured problem solving
- Communication skills

Family members can also ask for assistance with the following
- Psycho-education (about emotional responses to illness, providing support, etc.)
- Grief counselling / anticipatory grief / general counselling

How to contact the Psychologist
Phone 4226 6385

**Speech Pathology**

Speech Pathologists are trained in the assessment and management of speech, language, voice and swallowing disorders.

Why should I see a Speech Pathologist?
Generally, chemotherapy alone does not lead directly to a problem swallowing. Any difficulty with eating and drinking is most likely related to a number of factors, including changes after surgery and the side effects of radiotherapy. However, some chemotherapy drugs can cause mucositis in the mouth (ie inflammation of the mucous membranes) which can directly lead to pain and discomfort when swallowing and changes in taste.

After radiation and / or chemotherapy, some common side effects for patients with cancers of the mouth, throat or head and neck can include
- Difficulty chewing and swallowing
- Painful swallowing
- Food and drink ‘going down the wrong way’
- Ulceration of the mouth, tongue and throat
- Thickening of saliva
- Dry mouth and throat
- Altered taste
- Nausea and reduced appetite
- Weight loss
- Jaw stiffness
- Changes to voice quality

If you experience ANY of these reactions or side effects it is important that you let a member of the oncology team know as soon as possible.

How can a Speech Pathologist help?
If you are experiencing any of the side effects listed above, the Speech Pathologist can help you in a number of ways, these include:
- Providing suggestions to keep your mouth moist and ideas to help reduce any sticky / thick saliva in your mouth and throat
- Providing ideas to make eating and drinking easier and more enjoyable
- Working with the dietitian to help you gain weight safely
- Recommending changes or modifications to what you eat and drink to assist with any swallowing difficulties
- Recommending specific exercises and strategies that may also help you swallow better
- Assessing and monitoring your speech, voice and swallowing function throughout your treatment and assist with further therapy if required after you finish your treatment

How to contact the Speech Pathologist:
Phone: 4226 6385

Information from Working with Oral Cancer (Appleton and Machin) & Princess Alexandra Hospital Speech Pathology Radiation Therapy patient brochure.