

The Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Institute

The Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Institute (SHNCI) was established at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPAH) in 2002 by the late Professor Christopher O'Brien AO to provide comprehensive, state-of-the-art treatment to patients with cancers and diseases of the head and neck.



The Institute brings together over 40 highly skilled medical and allied health professionals including surgeons, radiation and medical oncologists, dental specialists, speech therapists, specialist nurses and dieticians, along with research scientists and data managers. The Institute is proudly part of The Chris O'Brien Lifehouse at RPA.

What is head and neck cancer?

The term "head and neck cancer" does not refer to a single type of malignant tumour but rather to a range of different cancers which happen to arise in the tissues of the head and neck. The most important of these are cancers of the mouth, throat and sinuses, cancers of the salivary glands and secondary cancers which have spread to involve the lymph glands of the neck from other sites. These tumours can affect speaking, chewing and swallowing, all vitally important functions that we take for granted.

How common are head and neck cancers?

Cancer Council statistics indicate that there are about 1,000 new cases of head and neck cancers in NSW each year but this number does not include the many patients with previously treated head and neck cancers who develop recurrence of their disease. A further 2,000 patients develop benign (non-cancerous) lumps and conditions involving the head and neck region and many of these require complex surgical treatment, similar to patients with cancer.

What is the treatment pathway?

Following your diagnosis by one of the head and neck specialists an appointment will be made for you to attend the Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic where your treatment will be discussed. A treatment plan will be given to you and you will meet the relevant team members.

For those patients having surgery an appointment will be made for you to attend the Head and Neck Pre-admission Clinic. The pre-admission clinic ensures quality of care for all head and neck patients and runs medical checks on patients one or two weeks before surgery to ensure they are fit enough. The clinic has a team of specialists in the areas of Dietetics, Speech Pathology, Case Management and Anaesthetics. The clinic also has a dedicated hospital registrar and intern.

The pre-admissions clinic operates every Friday from 9am – 12pm.

Why does the SHNCI have a multidisciplinary team approach to treatment?

Patients with head and neck cancer often need more than one form of treatment – surgery followed by radiotherapy or combined radiotherapy and chemotherapy. These patients also need skilled nursing, dental care, nutritional support, speech pathology and rehabilitation. Clearly, no one individual can provide all the necessary treatment and the best care can only be given by a highly trained and dedicated team.

More information?

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Clinical Nurse Consultant on 02 9515 6111 who will help coordinate and support your care before, during and after treatment.

Access to support programs

The RPAH Cancer Information and Support Centre is located on Level 3, Gloucester House. It is a central place for cancer patients, their families and carers to get support and information about cancer.

Simply call the Information Line on 02 9515 6677, visit www.sydneycancer.com.au or drop by to find out about their range of services.

What you can do to help?

The Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Institute can only continue to deliver breakthroughs in head and neck cancer care, treatment and research with your support. Please consider sending a tax deductible donation to the Institute. Your generosity will be gratefully acknowledged and you can be assured all donations to the Institute will go directly back to patients via clinical care, updating of equipment and research.

To make a donation visit www.shnci.org or call 02 9515 7537.

My Appointments

See overleaf

