

PHYSIOTHERAPISTS UNITE FOR IMPROVED CANCER TREATMENT



Uniting against cancer.

UKZN's Physiotherapy discipline partnered with KwaZulu-Natal's Physiotherapy Provincial Forum in a workshop on the Westville campus on cancer treatment interventions.

Physiotherapists play a crucial role in providing palliative care throughout a patient's experience with cancer to ease pain and improve their overall quality of life, according to workshop convener and Physiotherapy lecturer, Dr Sonill Maharaj.

The auditorium of nearly 50 physiotherapists from healthcare facilities throughout KwaZulu-Natal were addressed by seasoned Dutch oncology physiotherapist, Ms Liesbeth Raymaker, who described cancer as a malignant growth or tumour resulting from the division of abnormal cells, with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body.

Raymaker said there were more than 100 types of cancer with the disease manifesting on any type of tissue and its treatment always personalised, depending on the type, tissue, grade, genetic profile, age and comorbidities within the patient.

Raymaker also presented a framework for cancer including its physiology, types, staging, incidence, prevalence and treatment driven by her passion for palliative care. She indicated that cancer could be detected through screening programmes such as mammograms, pap smears and prostate-specific antigen tests – all of which can be rather costly and report false negatives. The physical symptoms included lymph nodes, night sweating as well as weight loss.

Her advice was to always ask patients about family history and lifestyle. Hormonal and immune response symptoms included hypoglycaemia, dermatomyositis, thrombosis, proximal weakness, osteopenia and Cushing's syndrome, among others.

PhD candidate, Ms Donnée Ness, said her study was on fascial techniques to reduce the incidence of lymphedema in breast cancer patients. Ness said women over the age of 40 were more at risk for cancer but encouraged young women to start screening for cancer as early detection helped with treatment.

Maharaj said the workshop promoted oncology rehabilitation, ethics and palliative care for oncology patients. 'In a broader perspective this partnership will ensure that community outreach and participation within the community is facilitated as community engagement is an important goal of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.'

Lunga Memela