

Pulmonary Fibrosis Stories

The GP's Role in Early Diagnosis of Pulmonary Fibrosis



Dr Kerry Hancock is a general practitioner (GP) based in Adelaide with a long-standing special interest in respiratory medicine, including pulmonary fibrosis (PF).

Over the years, Dr Hancock has cared for many patients with PF, a complex and progressive lung disease that is often diagnosed late due to its general symptoms.

'Pulmonary fibrosis is a serious condition which presents with a gradual onset of breathlessness, decreased ability to exercise, a dry irritating cough and gradual unintentional weight loss.

'Unfortunately, these symptoms are quite general, and similar to other more common heart and lung disorders, which can delay diagnosis,' she explains.

According to Dr Hancock, it's relatively simple to diagnose pulmonary fibrosis and she says early diagnosis improves patient outcomes. This is why the role of the GP is very important.

'All it takes is a high-resolution CT scan of the lungs,' she says.

Determining the specific type of pulmonary fibrosis can be more complex though, or if the diagnosis is unclear, then Dr Hancock recommends a specialist referral.

'I would most likely refer a patient on to a respiratory specialist or an Interstitial Lung Disease Clinic for diagnosis. The patient would then have other investigations such as lung function tests, blood tests, walking tests, and sometimes even a lung washing or biopsy,' she says.

Dr Hancock encourages anyone experiencing persistent respiratory symptoms, such as a chronic cough or breathlessness to speak with their GP and raise the possibility of pulmonary fibrosis.

'It is really important to accurately diagnose PF early so patients can get fast access to the right treatment for them.'

- Dr Kerry Hancock

'We know that earlier diagnosis leads to earlier treatment and better outcomes. Medications, pulmonary rehabilitation, and support services can make a significant difference when started early,' she says.

GPs are encouraged to maintain a high index of suspicion of pulmonary fibrosis in patients presenting with unexplained breathlessness or chronic cough, or velcro type crackles on chest auscultation.

Early investigation, including chest x ray and high-resolution CT, can make a critical difference.



Centre of Research Excellence in
Pulmonary Fibrosis

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Pulmonary Fibrosis
Awareness Month

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