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BACKGROUND

In 2007, there were 957 new cases of head and neck (H&N) cancer in NSW, representing 3.4% of all cancers in males and 1.6% in females¹. These numbers are relatively small; however the care needs of patients with H&N cancer are multi-faceted and complex.

The development of educational programs to encourage sub-specialisation and exchange of knowledge for specific cancers is a core component of the Cancer Institute NSW's NSW Oncology Group (NSWOG) terms of reference. In accordance with this defined activity, tumour stream NSWOGs were offered the opportunity to host a Cancer Institute NSW Clinical Cancer Forum on an area of focus determined by the membership of the Group.

NSWOG Head and Neck identified a need for education for health professionals who work with H&N cancer patients, and may not have received specific training on the unique needs of this patient population.

AIM

The inaugural *Optimising Care for Patients with Head and Neck Cancer* professional education forum aimed to provide multidisciplinary clinical education for health professionals caring for patients with H&N cancer and improve awareness of current treatment practices.

METHOD

NSWOG Head and Neck convened a subcommittee lead by Merran Findlay (Oncology Dietitian, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital) and Joan Ryan (Palliative Care Clinical Nurse Consultant, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital) to develop a clinical forum program (Figure 1) to address the educational objectives:

1. To provide a multidisciplinary clinical forum for health professionals caring for patients with H&N cancer.
2. To improve awareness of current treatment practices for patients with H&N cancer.
3. To provide an overview of the multi-faceted and complex needs of patients with H&N cancer.

The day featured eleven presentations and a multidisciplinary Q&A panel. Educational themes were aligned to the patient journey – from signs, symptoms, referral pathways and treatment to palliative care.

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of head and neck cancer management, targeted participants included all health professionals including medical officers and general practitioners, nursing and allied health.

Figure 1: Forum Program

Program	
8:00am	Registration (tea and coffee)
8:45am	Welcome and Introduction
9:00am	The Patient Perspective Noelene Hunt
9:15am	Signs, Symptoms and Referral Pathways Dr Kerwin Shannon, Director, Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Institute, Head and Neck Surgeon, Chair, NSWOG Head and Neck
9:45am	Surgical Techniques Dr Carsten Patme, Head and Neck Surgeon, Westmead Hospital
10:20am	Patterns of Patient Information Needs and Affective Distress for people with Head and Neck Cancer and their family members Lara Duff-Arns, Head and Neck Cancer Nurse Co-ordinator, Liverpool Hospital
10:30am	Morning Tea (Provided)
11:00am	Role of Chemotherapy in Head and Neck Cancer Professor Michael Bayes, Medical Oncologist Sydney Cancer Centre
11:40am	Radiotherapy Techniques Dr Allan Fowler, Radiation Oncologist, SSWAHS
12:10pm	Oral Complications of Head and Neck Cancer Treatment Dr Sue-Chang Yeoh, Specialist, Oral Medicine & Oral Pathology, SSWAHS Dr Claire Scott, Senior Dental Officer, RPA Dental Clinic
12:40pm	Lunch (Provided)
1:40pm	Speech and Swallowing Issues Julia Maclean, Speech Pathologist, St George Hospital
2:10pm	Nutritional Challenges for Patients with Head and Neck Cancer Merran Findlay, Senior Oncology Dietitian, RPA
2:40pm	Caring for Tracheostomy and PEG at home Justine Oates, Head and Neck Cancer Care Coordinator, RPA
3:10pm	Palliative Care Perspectives Joan Ryan, Palliative Care Clinical Nurse Consultant, RPA
3:40pm	Multidisciplinary Q & A
4:00pm	Complimentary Drinks

RESULTS

- Forum participation exceeded venue capacity, with a total of 194 attendees.
- Attendees represented over 25 disciplines and 70 hospitals/organisations across Australia.
- The nursing profession had the highest representation, with 47% of attendees. This was followed by dietetics, 15%, and speech pathology, 15% (see Figure 2).
- The Cancer Institute NSW supported travel and accommodation for over 40 participants from rural and regional NSW and ACT.
- 100% of attendees reported the day met their needs.
- 100% of attendees would attend a similar education day in the future.
- Attendees rated "The Patient Perspective" session presented by a Head & Neck cancer survivor (see box) as the most helpful session of the day (see Figure 3).
- Overall, participants liked the multidisciplinary approach to the program most (see Figure 4).

- 36% of respondents suggested future forums could incorporate a workshop component to foster interaction and open discussion. The option of incorporating case studies in an MDT discussion style into the program was also suggested.
- Participants suggested inclusion a psychosocial session in future head and neck forums.
- 70% of attendees felt they would benefit from a yearly event.

Figure 3: Average session ratings (1 least helpful - 5 most helpful)

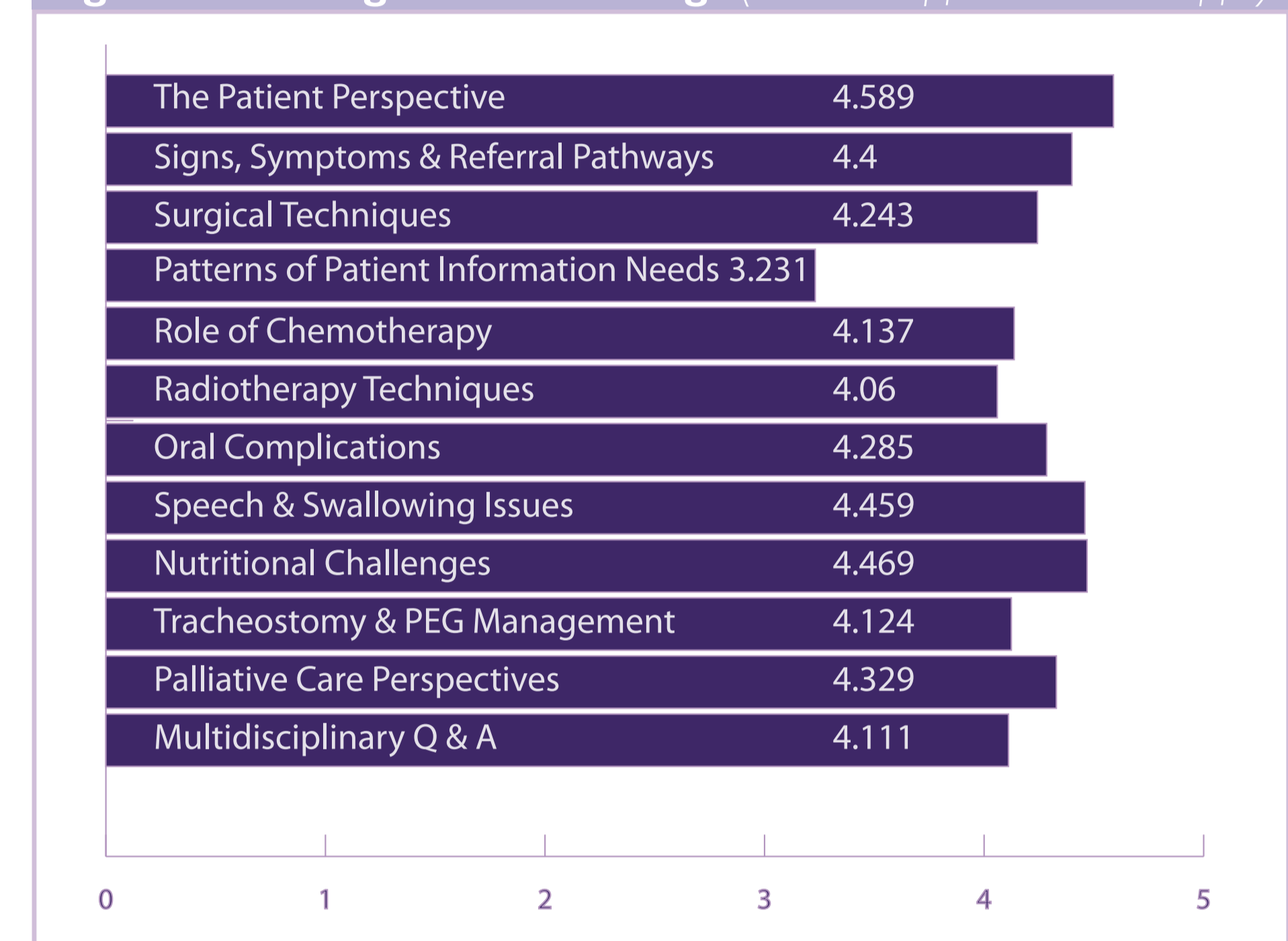


Figure 2: Forum attendance by profession

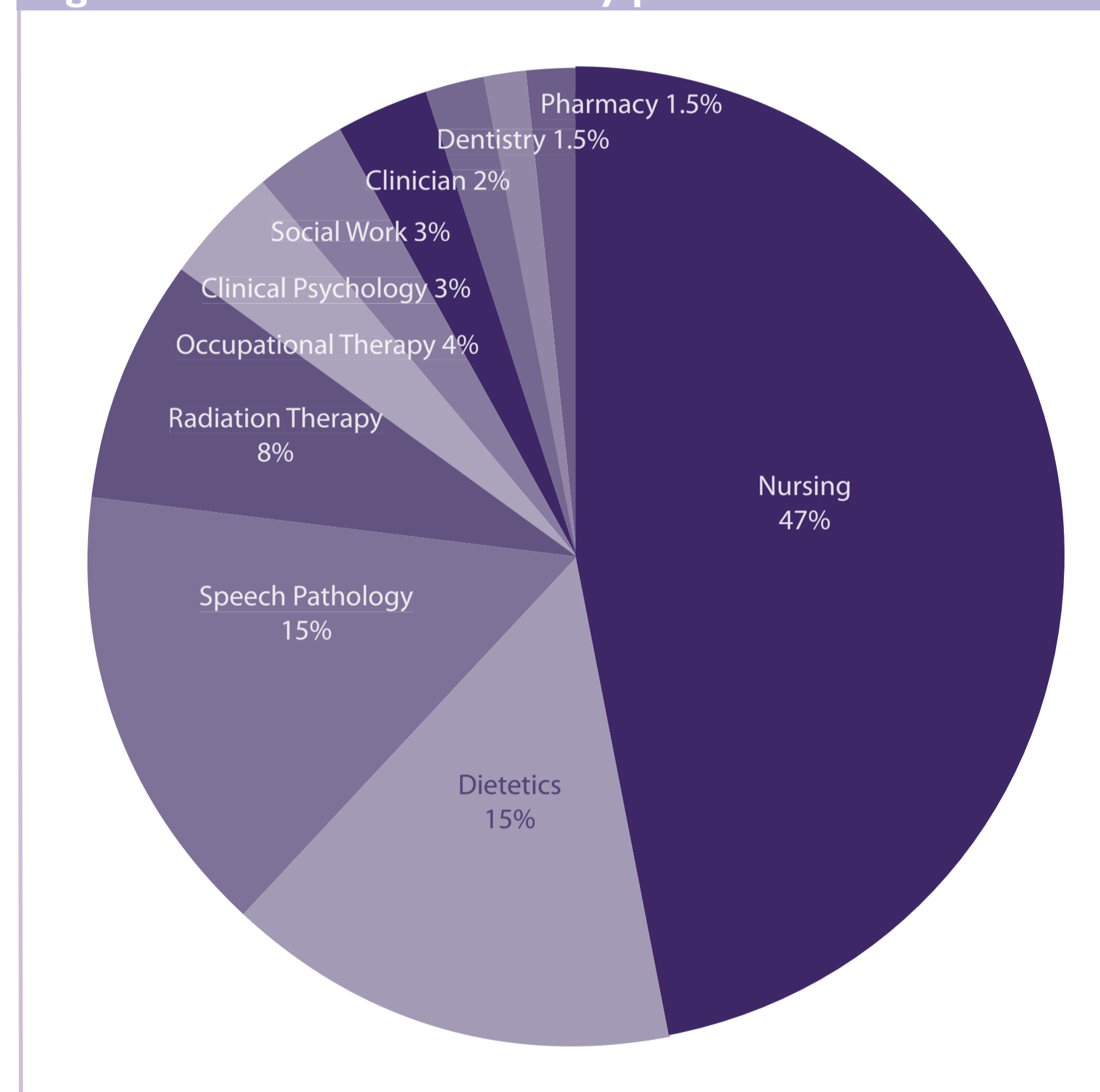


Figure 4: What participants liked most about the day

- Multidisciplinary approach to the program (n=36)
- Variety of topics (n=27)
- Expert speakers (n=26)
- The Patient Perspective session (n=26)
- Informative (n=17)

Figure 5: Suggested formats for future forums

- Discipline specific workshop component to allow discussion on specific issues, current practice or research of direct relevance
36%
- Workshop component to foster interaction and open discussion
28%
- Incorporation of case studies in an MDT discussion style
16%



In April 2007, Noelene Hunt was diagnosed with a nasopharyngeal carcinoma and was treated with chemotherapy and radiotherapy at the Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Clinic. As the first speaker of the forum, Noelene presented her personal journey as a head and neck cancer patient to set the scene of 'patient focussed care'. Noelene's session was rated as the most enjoyed session of the day (see figure 3).

CONCLUSION

The forum successfully achieved its objectives, providing education about best current treatment practices for a multidisciplinary group of H&N health professionals across rural, regional and metropolitan NSW. The forum was highly valued and achieved outstanding evaluation results.

References

1. Tracey E, Ling L, Baker D, Dobrovic A, Bishop J Cancer in New South Wales: Incidence and Mortality 2007. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW, December 2009.