

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Study aims to help partners cope in tough times

A new research project at the University of Tasmania is setting out to examine the psychological responses of people whose partners are diagnosed with a life threatening illness.

The project is being conducted by Dr Janet Haines and Miss Kym Nutting from the School of Psychology as part of Ms Nutting's Masters in Psychology (Clinical).

The study will examine the psychological and psychophysiological reactions of partners of people with life-threatening illnesses to illness-related events.

Psychophysiological reactions refer to changes in heart rate and breathing rate.

Hearing of the diagnosis, coping with treatment or treatment side-effects and dealing with the fear of relapse have all been identified as being likely to create a negative psychological response.

Miss Nutting said it is established that the negative psychological effects of being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness can extend beyond the person with the medical condition to close family members.

"The majority of research has focused on the development of psychological symptoms, including posttraumatic stress symptoms, in parents of childhood cancer survivors," she said.

"Despite less research attention being given to the effect on the spouses of people with severe illnesses, there is some evidence in the literature that partners and spouses may experience adverse psychological effects."

The information obtained from the study will help understanding of how people who are indirectly exposed to distressing or traumatic events respond to those events.

"It is hoped that by talking to individuals who develop stress response symptoms from exposure to their partner's life threatening illness, interventions can be developed to manage or prevent these negative consequences," Miss Nutting said.

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