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ECHUCA MOAMA GNO FIGHTS HIDDEN COST OF CANCER

Since the Echuca Moama Girls Night Out (GNO) initiative began in 2008, more than 400 local families have received financial support through the charity's Oncology Department Supportive Care Program.

The program is managed by the oncology service at Echuca Regional Health and provides cancer patients with financial assistance for supportive care including counselling, rent payments, wigs, alternative therapies, lymphodema sleeves, fuel cards, accommodation, home help and child care.

GNO committee member Leonie Canham said the charity had been overwhelmingly embraced by the Echuca Moama community, and had raised more than \$200,000 since inception.

In the past 12 months alone, Ms Canham said 70 local residents had received a combined \$22,000 in financial support from the GNO Supportive Care Fund.

"That figure funded 29 wigs, multiple lymphoedema garments and oncology massage sessions to treat pain and other side effects of cancer surgery," she said.

"It also provided funding for counselling sessions, including therapy for children affected by a cancer diagnosis in the family, and supported people experiencing high costs associated with accessing treatments in Melbourne, Bendigo and other locations as referred."

Ms Canham said all those accessing the program were supported by the specialist cancer nursing team at Echuca Regional Health, who worked closely with patients and families to assess needs and coordinate care related to a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

ERH Oncology Department Nurse Unit Manager Lyn Jeffreson said the supportive care fund was making a meaningful difference to the lives of many in the community who were living with cancer.

"A cancer diagnosis is usually unexpected, scary and never convenient," Ms Jeffreson said.

"The hidden cost of dealing with cancer treatment can cause anxiety and hardship and although some financial support is available through the Cancer Council and travel reimbursement schemes, people can still face financial strain.

"This is where the GNO Supportive Care Fund is so valuable to the people in our community. Those funds are utilised to purchase services or goods that are vitally important or necessary for people having cancer treatment but otherwise not funded by government sources. This flexibility is wonderful for people as they can access some support where the greatest financial need is for them.

"From a nursing point of view, we are so thankful to have the GNO Supportive Care Fund enabling us to assist with worries and distress that our patients experience. We see how grateful recipients are, particularly when they realise that the funds come from the community for the community."

Echuca Moama GNO was established in 2008 by a small collective of women who have each experienced first-hand the impact of cancer upon loved ones.

Moama's Michelle Noelker was among the founding members of the charity, during a time in which she was fighting her own cancer battle. She lost her life to the disease in 2010, aged 38.

"The GNO movement aims to connect, embrace and engage the sisterhood of our community to shape a strong and vibrant network of women who are there for each other in times of need," Ms Canham said.



Girls Night Out

Echuca Moama

Raising funds
for the GNO
Oncology Department
Supportive Care Program
at
Echuca Regional Health

“The concept is also about showing appreciation of the wonderful team at ERH oncology, without whom so many local lives would be so much more difficult.”

GNO will host its 13th major fundraising event – *A Lazy Sunday Afternoon* – on June 19 at Junction Moama from 3pm to 5pm.

The event will feature Echuca’s Cath Hughes as guest speaker – who will share her very raw and personal story of love and loss following the death of her 35-year-old husband to gastric cancer in early 2015.

Tickets are \$50 and include complimentary sparkling, white wine, red wine and canapes. To book tickets visit www.stickytickets.com.au/37531

For more information contact Leonie Canham on 0407 360 884 or visit the GNO facebook page at www.facebook.com/GNOechucamoama.