



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Navigating Cancer in the COVID Crisis and Beyond**

Cancer waits for no one. Each day in Australia 396 people a day are diagnosed with cancer, that's 145,000 Aussies per year who deal with a diagnosis, which is more than most daily COVID totals, and 50,000 will die. It certainly doesn't go into isolation because of COVID.

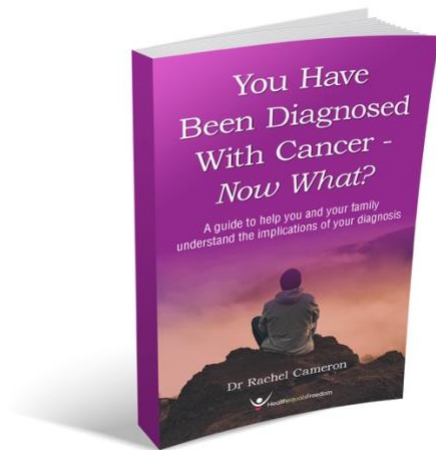
Recently many people have had their diagnosis delayed due to COVID ([Medical Republic, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Francine Crimmins](#)), because many have been reluctant to see their doctors or have tests done. Alarming, Cancer Council Victoria have reported a 37% drop in breast cancer diagnoses and the University of Melbourne, Cancer Research Centre says the costs to the Australian healthcare system will be large.

Cancer continues, and this means that thousands of Australians will continue to be diagnosed (hopefully) and treated amongst the virus crisis, creating further stress on individuals and the healthcare sector, but delays in cancer diagnosis may be far worse.

Health Equals Freedom is a new, unique National service for those newly diagnosed with cancer, anywhere in Australia, and is provided by secure Telehealth video and audio, it opened its doors just before the pandemic.

Dr Rachel Cameron, is the owner and founder of Health Equals Freedom, which she designed to meet an unmet need, due to her personal experience, interest and professional training, this service supports people in navigating their cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Dr Rachel Cameron has also written a new book to support this service, which maps out the most important information that someone needs when first diagnosed, the book can be used to prepare for meetings with doctors and to take notes in.



Dr. Rachel Cameron is currently supporting her mother, Jill, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in November last year from a BreastScreen. As well as a range of other clients who have recently received a cancer diagnosis.

“My mum is in her 70s and lives in rural Australia. Mum is undergoing breast cancer treatment in a public hospital that has COVID-19 patients. This has given me a deep insight into the challenges patients and their loved ones face every day, particularly during the current pandemic.”

“Patients struggle with a new cancer diagnosis. Cancer is complex and multifaceted in its nature. For many people this is their first experience with a serious illness. Many have relatively low health literacy and this new diagnosis is challenging and frightening to deal with, for them and their family”, says Dr. Cameron.

Dr. Cameron has Ph.D. in Medicine (Infectious Diseases), and is a virologist, with more than five years specialising in respiratory virology and more than 20 years of experience in healthcare including drug design, disability services and hospital and healthcare management. Dr. Cameron makes an invaluable ally and is uniquely placed to assist navigating through the cancer process and her virology background is an added benefit in the time of COVID.

In short, Dr. Cameron is one of Australia’s first Cancer Healthcare Navigators. She is qualified to assist people through the journey of being diagnosed and dealing with the roller coaster ride that cancer brings. She is able to talk to patients and doctors in the language required by both. Health Equals Freedom works collaboratively with doctors, nurses, allied health and other cancer service providers.

“It’s a difficult journey to navigate, especially if you have little understanding of the healthcare system. This is where we can be of assistance in navigating the path that lies ahead. Also, poor treatment choices can cost time and money, so starting off on the right foot can really improve the result,” says Dr. Cameron.

“Not all doctors are equipped with the most effective communication skills and often leave patients with more questions than answers regarding next steps and what to expect,” says Dr. Cameron. “It’s about being able to Make Sense of Cancer, the treatment options etc., and the medical jargon what goes with it.”

Dr. Cameron, who is also an experienced competitive sailor, likens her role to navigating a ship through a wild storm at sea. “Healthcare navigators assist patients to decide the most effective route, understand the medical language to ensure the individual and their loved ones can make informed decisions going forward”, says Dr. Cameron.

“As a National Healthcare Navigation service, our primary role is to support the person diagnosed with cancer, we attend appointments with our clients. We are here to help by empowering people. Giving patients and families support so they can easily make decisions about their own cancer treatment. Patient’s then can understand what the steps are in their journey and find the best path forward, which can also save them time, money and stress”, says Dr. Cameron.

Key Messages to Audience:

- Get your screens and tests done ASAP,
- Getting an early cancer diagnosis could save your life,
- Looking after your health could reduce your stress.

As the healthcare sector is focused on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Cameron wants those who are living with cancer to know they don’t have to do it alone.

END

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## **About Dr Rachel Cameron**

Dr Rachel Cameron holds a BSc (Hons1) (Pathology), and PhD (Medicine) (Infectious Diseases) from the University of Sydney and Stanford University in the USA. She has spent the past 20 years working in various roles in the healthcare sector including developing new cancer and other treatments, working in medical communications, NDIS, setting up a private mental health hospital, teaching at Sydney, Monash and Melbourne universities and leadership and executive coaching.

Dr Rachel identified a gap in service for people who have been diagnosed with cancer and who need assistance navigating the healthcare system. She launched *Health Equals Freedom – Making Sense of Cancer* in February 2020 and offers a service to meet patients where they are at physically, emotionally and in language they can understand with her business.

This business has been supported by a New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) Grant, delivered through the Federal Department of Employment and Training.



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