

Knowledge Translation

Nothing to fear? Facing the challenge of fear of cancer recurrence



The fear of cancer returning (FCR) is a very common struggle for many survivors, often reducing their quality of life during their recovery. In Episode 1 of the new **Series of Supportive Care Matters**, a podcast hosted by Medical Oncologist and International Cancer Survivorship Expert, Professor Bogda Koczwara AM, Professor Sophie Lebel (University of Ottawa) and Associate Professor Ben Smith (the University of Sydney) explore this deep-seated anxiety and unpack the realities of recurrence fears — why they persist, who is most affected, and how they impact daily life. Research shows nearly every cancer survivor experiences some level of worry, but for 40%, it becomes a significant source of distress. Caregivers, too, often share in this burden.

Sophie and Ben highlight the need for better interventions, especially for underrepresented groups, and share practical strategies for managing fear in clinical settings. From open conversations to structured support pathways, they highlight ways to help survivors move forward with confidence. Other themes include the need for FCR Interventions, the need for guidelines to equip health professionals, the challenge of implementation, the role and development of a clinical pathway, the advantages of stepped care, how to empower patients to manage FCR. Sophie and Ben also discuss their research, how collaboration may give researchers more bang for their buck compared to competition, the prospects of global collaboration, and talk about why supportive care matters. [Listen to the podcast](#)

Dr. Sophie Lebel is a clinical psychologist and a professor at the School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa. Her research focuses on cancer survivorship and psychosocial interventions. Her expertise is on managing fear of cancer recurrence (FCR) and this year she won the Bernie Fox Memorial award from IPOS in recognition of her work in this area. Over the past 15 years, she has been working on an FCR intervention called FORT, a group intervention for survivors that has been tested through clinical trials and is currently being culturally adapted in several countries. She is currently developing and testing FORT adaptations for caregivers and parents of pediatric cancer survivors. With funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, she is implementing FORT in 5 different Canadian oncology centers. She has held several leadership positions, including Chair of the Research Advisory Committee of the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology, Lead of the practice guidelines on the management of fear of cancer recurrence for Ontario Health, and co-director of the clinical psychology program at the University of Ottawa. Clinically, she works with cancer survivors and their loved ones across all phases of the disease trajectory.



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