

# Cancer - Body Image and Sexuality

Tabitha Healey  
Medical Oncologist  
Calvary Cancer Centre & Royal Adelaide Hospital

# Definitions

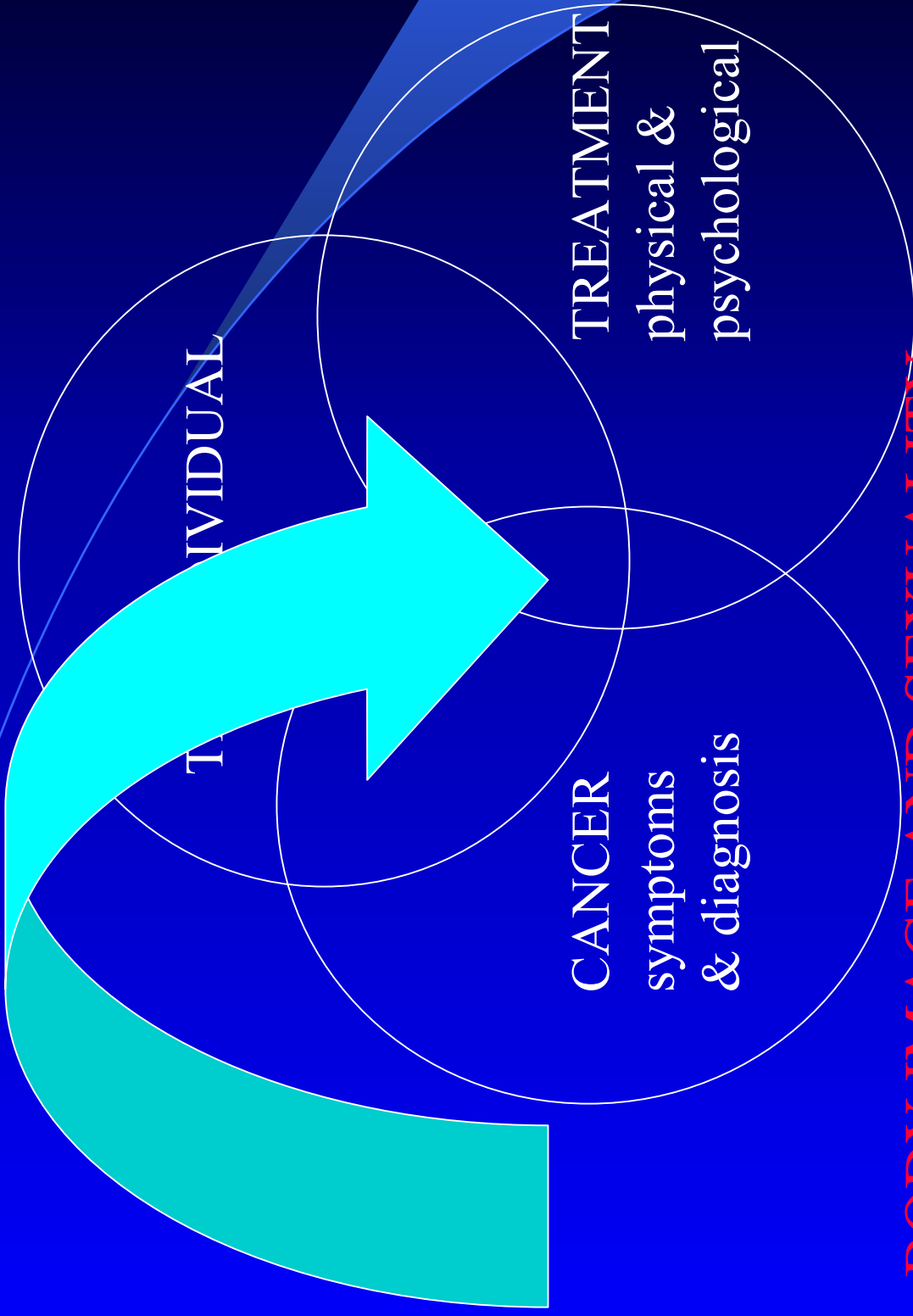
- Body image – how we perceive ourselves
- Sexuality – our sexual attitudes, behaviours and beliefs and our interaction with others

# Definitions

- Sexual function dependent on functioning -
- Nervous system
- Vascular system
- Endocrine system
- 3 break points
- Physical discomfort
- Emotional issues
- Mental preoccupation

# Body image & Sexuality

- These issues affect all patients and yet are rarely discussed
- Time constraints
- Embarrassment
- Lack the knowledge to intervene
- “Not my problem”
- **Limited research**



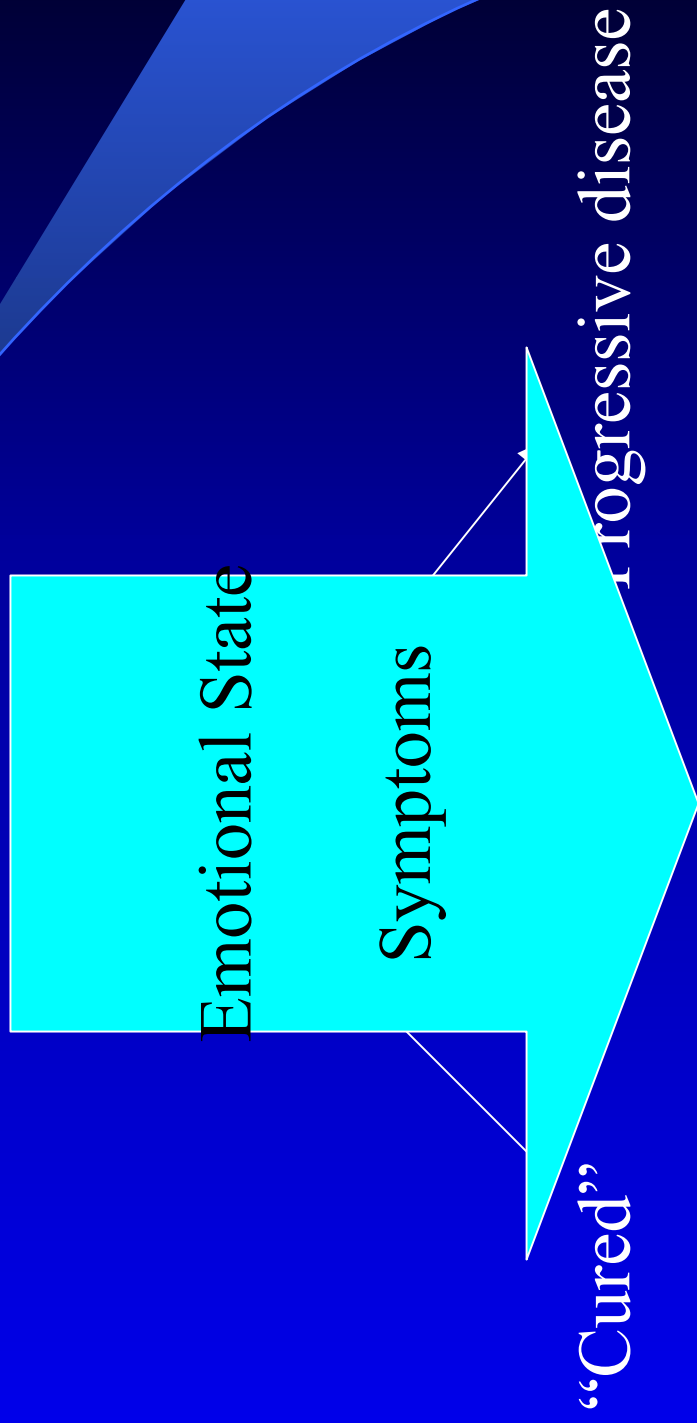
**BODY IMAGE AND SEXUALITY**

# The individual

- Age
- Sex
- Beliefs
- Attitudes
- Religion
- Circumstances
- Disease
- Treatment
- Premorbid personality

There is no “normal” response / behaviour

# CANCER – the process



# Emotional Impact

- The fog
- Fear, anxiety, grief
- Depression – tired, loss of appetite
- Mortality
- Distrust of body / vulnerability

# Relationships

- Accentuates pre-existing state
- Isolation
- Burden
- Changing roles – carer / provider

# Physical Impact

- Tired
- Loss of appetite / weight
- Pain
- Disfigurement

# Cancer Treatments - Surgery

- Disfigurement – body image
- Sexual function
- Sexuality

# Cancer Treatments - Radiotherapy

- Systemic side effects
- Local reactions
- Pelvic radiotherapy

# Cancer Treatments – Hormonal therapy

- BREAST CANCER Oestrogen +ve – cure or palliation
- Premature menopause – oestrogen blockade
  - Hot flushes
  - Weight gain
  - Loss of libido
  - Vaginal dryness
  - Loss of fertility

# Cancer Treatments – Hormonal therapy

- PROSTATE CANCER
- Blockade of testosterone
  - Loss of libido
  - Impotence

# Cancer Treatments - Chemotherapy

- Systemic treatment – kills dividing cells
- General side effects
  - Nausea and vomiting
  - Tiredness
  - Mouth ulcers
  - Diarrhoea

# Cancer Treatments - Chemotherapy

- Body image
- Hair loss
- Weight gain or loss
- Skin changes

# Cancer Treatments - Chemotherapy

- Sexuality
- Menopausal symptoms
- Loss of libido
- Fear of intimacy
- Infertility

# Management

- In order to manage – need to ask
- Discussion
  - Reassurance of safety
  - Reassurance that problems are not unique
  - Permission to discuss concerns

# Management

- Body image
  - Wigs
  - Prosthesis
  - Weight loss
  - Look good / feel better

# Management

- Sexuality – discussion
- Mismatch in desire
- Pain management
- Menopausal symptoms
- Impotence

# Could it be this simple?

- Has your diagnosis / treatment affected the way you feel about yourself / your relationship?
- Has your diagnosis / treatment affected your ability to perform sexually?

# Case - breast cancer

- Young – advanced disease
- Unable to look at or touch breast
- Chemo / hormone / radiotherapy
- Premature menopause
- Weight gain
- Anxiety/depression
- Relationship issues

# Case - rectal cancer

- Chemoradiotherapy - Surgery - chemotherapy
- Stoma
- Weight loss / lethargy
- Impotence
- Difficulty working
- Depression

# Case – Testicular cancer

- 18yo - widespread disease
- Discussion re sperm storage
- Orchiectomy
- Chemotherapy
- Nausea/vomiting/weight loss
- Hair loss / Lethargy