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Survivor children face life of illness

ROSE BRENNAN

CHILDREN with cancer are suffering from the disease for years after their treatment ends, research has found.

Data from the NSW Cancer Council shows more than 80 per cent of childhood cancer survivors will develop at least one life-changing mental or physical health issue later in life.

Research by University of NSW Associate Professor Claire Wakefield found later effects can include heart disease, obesity and osteoporosis, as well as depression. She found children struggled with their weight for up to seven years after cancer diagnosis.

Weight gain was due to poor dietary habits that are

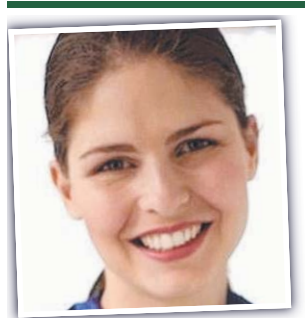
developing during treatment continuing after they leave hospital, as well as some medications ruining their metabolism.

Dr Wakefield has collaborated with Cancer Council NSW on a \$2.2 million project to address the issue. They are introducing six interventions to paediatric cancer survivors and their families, including nutrition lessons, mental health assessments and social skills to help them return to school.

She said young cancer

survivors mostly shunned the health system after they finished treatment: "We want to get them back because their risk of developing late effects increases as they get older.

"We need them to come back when they're 15, 20, 30 years old because that's when they need to be thinking about their health which I don't think all survivors understand yet."



Professor Wakefield.