



Last gasp rescue

How new lung cancer test is saving lives

MIRANDA WOOD
SENIOR WRITER

SUZANNE Welman owes her life to a groundbreaking cancer screening trial.

She has become the first NSW patient on this study to have her lung cancer detected early and surgically removed to cure the 74-year-old of the disease.

“By the time I would have got any symptoms, it would have been too late,” Ms Welman said. “They caught it in time so I don’t need any radiation or chemotherapy.”

More than 9000 Australians lose their lives to lung cancer each year.

St Vincent’s thoracic specialist Dr Emily Stone said screening high-risk patients early was effective.

“We know that if you do a CT scan of the right people and find a small early lung cancer, you can save their life,” Dr Stone said.

The new research program is targeting high-risk patients between the ages of 55 and 80 who are smokers or have recently smoked.

St Vincent’s Hospital is one of a number of centres nationwide participating in the international trial, which performs low-dose chest CT scans to detect early lung cancer.

“Anyone with early stage,

you usually find it by accident,” Dr Stone said.

“By the time somebody’s coughing up blood, almost always they’re beyond the curable stage.”

Dr Stone said she hoped the results of the new trial, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, would persuade the federal govern-

ment to fund a national lung screening program.

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Her scan that revealed the early cancer.

ment to fund a national lung screening program.

A smoker for 58 years, Ms Welman, from Sydney’s east, hasn’t touched a cigarette since undergoing her lifesaving operation at St Vincent’s in December.

“Without entering the trial, I would’ve just kept on merrily smoking and been dead of stage four in a few years’ time,” she said.

Dr Stone said Ms Welman was the “perfect example” of the benefits of early screening.

“She didn’t really know if anything would be found but we did find a nodule, worked it up, and it turned out to be early stage,” she said.

Dr Stone said “nobody deserves lung cancer, whether they smoked or





Lung cancer survivor Suzanne Welman gets to spend more time with granddaughter Sophie Welman. Picture: Sam Rutty