

MEDIA RELEASE

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Nurse Practitioner project will make an IM/NPACT

Nurse Practitioners could be an answer to improving provision of health care in an ageing population, as we experience an increase in demands on doctors and an escalation in costs of care.

The UTAS Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre is at the forefront of research into Nurse Practitioners in the health care system.

It has recently been awarded a federal Department of Health and Ageing grant of more than \$600,000 for a three-year project called IM/NPACT Tasmania, to trial Aged Care Nurse Practitioner models for effectiveness.

Nurse Practitioners are experts in specific areas of nursing who have completed both advanced university study at a Masters degree level and extensive clinical training to expand upon the traditional role of a Registered Nurse.

They use extended skills, knowledge and experience in the assessment, planning, implementation, diagnosis and evaluation of care required.

Dr Christine Stirling, Wicking Centre Research Associate, Senior Lecturer in the UTAS School of Nursing and Midwifery, and Chief Investigator on the Nurse Practitioner Project, said Nurse Practitioners aren't a replacement for doctors, but they are able to provide some services to free up doctors and provide a more holistic approach.

"We're trying to define a range of skills that could be key in an Aged Care Nurse Practitioner model," Dr Stirling said.

Nurse Practitioner Hazel Ryan has already begun collaborating with General Practitioners (GPs) in Lauderdale and will soon begin working within Residential Aged Care Facilities.

Hazel is a specialist in aged care, mental health and in particular dementia management. She is involved in a Wicking Centre memory clinic assessment research project. Hazel is enjoying her research role.

"There are only 31 such projects Australia-wide and this is the only one that has commenced thus far in Tasmania, so it's important for the future of aged care here in this state," Hazel said.

Dr Stirling said while Nurse Practitioners have been around for several years in the US and UK, they are relatively new in Australia, but it is becoming a growing field.

“It’s a very exciting time for Nurse Practitioners and also health care,” she said.

This is an Australian Government initiative. It is being delivered as a partnership between the UTAS School of Nursing and Midwifery investigators Dr Stirling and Professor Andrew Robinson and Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services investigators Dr Martin Morrissey and Nurse Practitioner Hazel Ryan of Older Persons Mental Health Services.

The funding has also enabled the employment of Melinda Minstrell as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow whose PhD examined specialist nurse practice in rural settings.

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