

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Free dementia education goes global

The dramatic increase in dementia cases both in Australia and globally, and the consequent need for quality dementia education, has inspired the University of Tasmania to launch the world's first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) devoted to the condition.

The free online course, *Understanding Dementia*, has been developed by the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, based in UTAS's Faculty of Health Science.

The course, which has already attracted more than 3000 registrants internationally, will be officially launched today (**Tuesday 16 July 2013**) by Professor Denise Fassett, Dean of the Faculty of Health Science.

"We are excited to see the interest in this new course," said Professor Fassett, "We have registrants from more than 30 countries to date."

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education) Professor David Sadler explains the University's vision for the course, "We have taken a discrete and targeted approach in an area of community need that links genuinely leading-edge research and teaching expertise."

"The MOOC is designed to appeal to and connect a broad range of students including health professionals, community and residential facility support staff, health policymakers, social scientists, people in the early stages of the condition, their family members and friends, and all those with a general interest in the condition."

In 2011, there were an estimated 298,000 people with dementia in Australia. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, this number is

expected to increase markedly, with projections suggesting numbers will reach around 400,000 by 2020 and 900,000 by 2050.

Co-director of the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, Professor James Vickers, describes the Wicking Centre's approach: "Our goal is to improve the quality of life for people with dementia, their families and carers.

*"Understanding Dementia* has been structured as a complete and comprehensive course of 11 weeks duration, with the goal of providing quality evidence-based information about dementia. We have also established a pathway for formal recognition of a participant's MOOC learning, via entry into the University of Tasmania's degree in Dementia Care."

*Understanding Dementia* is divided into three primary themes: 'the brain', 'the diseases' and 'the person', and includes basic brain anatomy, pathology, dementia research, risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, medical management, living with dementia, progression and staging, palliation, behaviours and therapeutic approaches.

MOOC co-ordinator Dr Carolyn King has managed all aspects of course development and delivery.

"We have tailored the course design, presentation and content at a level that we feel will be broadly appealing," Dr King said. "The material is delivered by experts in the field of dementia including neuroscientists, health scientists, clinicians, dementia care professionals, personal carers and people with dementia."

It is presented in the form of video clips, activities, scenarios, quizzes and discussion questions, where participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns, ideas, perspectives and approaches to dementia with an international network of peers online.

Registrations for the *Understanding Dementia* MOOC are now open, with the course due for release on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

[www.utas.edu.au/wicking/understanding-dementia](http://www.utas.edu.au/wicking/understanding-dementia)

<http://www.utas.edu.au/channel-utas/learning-at-utas/media/understanding-dementia-utas-first-mooc>

## What is dementia?

- Dementia is an umbrella term describing a syndrome associated with more than 100 different diseases that are characterised by the impairment of brain functions, including language, memory, perception, personality and cognitive skills.
- Although the type and severity of symptoms and their pattern of development varies with the type of dementia, it is usually of gradual onset, progressive in nature and irreversible.
- The most common type of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. Other common types include Vascular Dementia, which is associated with problems in the flow of blood to the brain; Dementia with Lewy Bodies; Korsakoff's syndrome (alcohol-related dementia); Dementia with Parkinson's disease and Huntington's disease.
- Dementia is not a normal part of ageing, although it is more common in older people and affects about one in four people over the age of 85. The term Younger Onset Dementia is used to describe dementia occurring in people aged under 65 years.

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