

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Mindful care for carers

Mindfulness activities may be useful in reducing the stress and increasing quality of life for those people caring for family members or friends with a palliative illness.

Researchers from the University of Tasmania's Rural Clinical School have carried out the first systematic literature review on the usefulness of mindfulness-based interventions for informal palliative caregivers.

The research paper, recently published in the international journal *Palliative Medicine* suggested that mindfulness-based stress reduction models provided a feasible and potentially beneficial approach for reducing the caregiver burden, depression and enhancing quality of life for family caregivers caring at the end of life.

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) aim to improve individual ability to deal with life stressors by cultivating present moment awareness, rather than being swept away in past or future concerns. Participants learn to sit with and observe their changing field of thoughts, feelings and sensations without judging or seeking to alter the experience. Mindfulness based stress management programs are traditionally delivered over 6-8 weeks for 2.5 hours a week, with daily mindfulness practices encouraged through the program.

University of Tasmania Rural Clinical School Researcher, Linda Jaffray, said that the results are encouraging in terms of the benefit that empowering and proactive approaches may have for family caregivers, whose self-care needs are often placed second to patient need, delayed or missed all together.

"Caring for people at end of life is an immensely rewarding, but also a very challenging experience, there is a need to explore ways to enhance people's innate strengths and resourcefulness as opposed to a risk and crisis orientated approach," Ms Jaffray said.

"This review provides an indication of how carers may be supported by mindfulness based interventions."

"Further research is required to guide the development and application of mindfulness-based models for carers, and to determine the actual impact these have on carer's experience, quality of life, tendency towards depression and ability to remain buoyant in their caring role."

Information released by:

University of Tasmania, Communications and Media Office

Phone: 61 3 6226 2691

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au