

MEDIA RELEASE

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Improving Access to End of Life Care Services

Specialist palliative care provider, HammondCare, has been commissioned by the Sydney North Primary Health Network to provide quality End of Life Care education and training for staff working in residential aged care across Northern Sydney.

General Manager, Health and Hospitals for HammondCare, Stewart James, said “This grant will allow a specialist nursing team to work with local facilities and general practices to build skills and capability, improve access to training and advice, and develop and foster networks and partnerships. This dedicated resource will work closely with frontline aged care staff to develop a best practice approach to caring for people who are dying or nearing end of life.”

“The emphasis will be on upskilling staff to ensure that the patient’s physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs are met, that pain is managed appropriately, and that dignity and privacy is respected,” he said.

End of Life Care is a key priority area for the Sydney North Primary Health Network. We have worked collaboratively with our After Hours Network to identify that the ageing population will increase demand on existing End of Life Care services and that improvements in End of Life Care provides an opportunity to strengthen community based care, improve coordination of care between existing services, improve access to and delivery of supportive resources and reduce unplanned hospitalisations.

A recent and well publicised report from the Grattan Institute has identified the desire for many Australians to die at home (70%) yet only 14% able to achieve that outcome. The report also highlights that across Australia approximately 54% of people die in hospitals and 32% in residential aged care and that because most people do not speak-up about the way they would like to die, they often experience a disconnected, confusing, and distressing array of services, interventions, and relationships with health professionals. This is particularly evident after hours.

It also recommends greater investment in community-based care to enable services for those dying of chronic illness to shift their focus from cures and institutional care to supporting people’s wishes to die at “home”.

Sydney North Primary Health Network anticipate the following outcomes from this program:

- Increased number of patients in Residential Aged Care patients receiving appropriate End of Life Care.
- Less unplanned hospital presentations and admissions from Residential Aged Care patients, especially after hours.
- Increased choice and control for the patient and their families.
- Reduced discomfort and pain for the patient.
- Reduced anxiety for patients and their families.
- More timely access to specialist palliative care if required.

Phone: (02) 9432 8250
Email: info@snhn.org.au
Address: Level 1, Building B
207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065
Post: PO Box 97, St Leonards NSW 1590
www.snhn.org.au

- More timely access to bereavement support for families.
- Increased communication/involvement of the treating GP and other health professionals.

“HammondCare's expertise in End of Life Care, palliative care and aged care service provision, along with their experience leading and contributing to local, state and national programs position them to strongly develop and lead this program to enhance End of Life Care to patients in Residential Aged Care Facilities within the Sydney North Primary Health Network. This funding aims to provide a significantly improved experience for patients in Residential Aged Care facilities and their families during the last stages of their life. For some this may be the last few days and weeks of life. For others, it may be for many months, and for some, several years. With HammondCare we want to explore new and innovative ways of delivering initiatives to improve the quality of End of Life Care in Residential Aged Care Facilities that may, at some future date, be scaled up and delivered more widely,” says SNPHN General Manager, Primary Care Advancement & Integration, Cynthia Stanton.

HammondCare operates two inpatient units (Greenwich and Neringah), a specialist palliative care community service covering Greenwich (lower north shore) Neringah (upper north shore) and Mona Vale (covering eastern region of Northern Sydney), and also provides a consultancy service to the Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) acute hospitals, both public and private. HammondCare is the lead partner in the Palliative Care Home Support Program, operating in 7 New South Wales Local Health Districts - including NSLHD. Since commencement in 2013, in NSLHD there have been 655 packages delivered to 571 patients in the home, and 363 of these were home deaths meaning 71% deaths occurred at home and kept from the stresses of the acute hospitals in Northern Sydney.

In Sydney, HammondCare operates three inpatient Palliative Care units with more than 1,000 annual admissions, three community Palliative Care teams seeing over 2,000 patients annually and a Palliative Care in-reach program into acute hospitals that supports close to 3,000 people annually. HammondCare also runs a Centre for Learning and Research with a focus on innovative research and education in Palliative Care. HammondCare's existing Palliative Care clinical nurse consultants also provide in-reach support to more than 120 aged care homes with links to acute hospitals and primary health services in Northern Sydney, providing expert advice, support and training on End of Life Care.

This initiative will be independently evaluated by the University of Technology Sydney focussing on outcomes that support capacity building and linkages between Residential Aged Care Facilities and other primary care and specialist clinicians, which result in wrap-around End of Life Care support.

“Increasing population growth for our region, an ageing population, potential healthcare workforce shortages and greater numbers of hospitalisations and GP visits over the next 15 years, Sydney North Primary Health Network will be concentrating on innovative and sustainable solutions that shift the focus of care out of the hospitals and into the hands of experienced practitioners and people who think outside of the box like HammondCare,” concludes SNPHN CEO Lynelle Hales.

Media Enquiries

Abby Edwards
Sydney North Primary Health Network
aedwards@snhn.org.au
T: 0417 808 107

Interview Opportunities

Cynthia Stanton - SNPHN General Manager,
Primary Care Advancement & Integration.
Stewart James - General Manager, Health and
Hospitals for HammondCare.

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