



# Media Release

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## Continuing to work may be important at end of life

Health professionals who encourage people with a life-limiting illness not to return to work may not be doing the best by their patients, according to a UK expert.

Dr Gail Eva, from Brunel University, London, says work has many psychological and social benefits that can have a significant impact on patients' sense of wellbeing, so it was important not to automatically encourage them to resign or take time off.

There were dangers in making assumptions about the role work plays in terminally ill patients' lives, rather than giving patients scope to think their options through.

"Health professionals think they are being kind and supportive when they encourage people to opt out of work, but some work environments may have a very positive impact on patients' mental and physical health.

"Work can give people a sense of competence and status and it plays an important role in giving structure to our day. You can replace work with internally driven and motivated activities, but it is much harder for people to sustain this," said Dr Eva, who has completed research into work support for people with cancer.

However, she said it was simplistic to presume all work was good for people with a terminal diagnosis.

"We can all think of work environments that are really bad for our physical and mental health, and for some patients, withdrawing from work might be the right thing."

Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan said palliative care aimed to help people live as well as possible at the end of life.

"If continuing in the workforce is important to a patient's sense of fulfilment and enjoyment of life, then support is available to help them achieve that."

Dr Eva, a senior lecturer in the department of clinical sciences, encouraged health professionals to be mindful of their own perceptions of work, as these could shape assumptions they make about patients.

Dr Eva is a keynote speaker at the largest gathering of palliative care professionals in Australia – Palliative Care Australia's 13th Australian Palliative Care Conference in Melbourne.

**Conference information: 13<sup>th</sup> Australian Palliative Care Conference 1-4 September 2015, [www.palliativecare.org.au/australian-palliative-care-conference](http://www.palliativecare.org.au/australian-palliative-care-conference).**

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