



# Media Release

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## **Yes I am dying, but I am a person, not a disease**

Reinforcing the personal identity of someone with life-limiting illness is an often overlooked factor that can significantly affect their quality of life, according to a UK expert.

Dr Gail Eva, from Brunel University, London, says it is common for people at the end of life to be slowly stripped of their sense of competence as they become more physically, psychologically and socially reliant on the people around them.

“This is exacerbated when people start relating to them as the person who has a terminal illness, rather than the golfer, or the guy who likes camping, or the woman who is a magnificent gardener.

“We can’t magic up increased physical ability, but we can help people to hold on to the idea they have of themselves. How we respond to the stories people tell about themselves requires careful thought.”

Dr Eva, a senior lecturer in the department of clinical sciences, says the problem sometimes stems from concerns about giving people false hope.

“This means we tend to negate what we are hearing when someone says they want to play golf again. We tend to think ‘That’s not very likely, I don’t want to encourage unrealistic expectations,’ rather than responding ‘Oh, you are a golfer? What is it about golf that you enjoy?’”

She says these conversations can also help to identify where palliative care can enhance quality of life for someone with a terminal diagnosis.

“It might be that they enjoyed the golf, but they also loved having a beer with mates in the clubhouse afterwards. With the right palliative care support, that might still be possible.”

Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan said palliative care enabled many people with terminal conditions to participate in activities that they found satisfying and enjoyable.

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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