



Media Release

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Talking about dying still difficult for health professionals

The Australian community is keen to talk about dying, but doctors and health professionals still struggle, says Professor David Currow, Professor of Palliative and Supportive Services at Flinders University in Adelaide.

Professor Currow said Australia had experienced several decades where the medical profession, in particular, has promised extraordinary outcomes mostly against odds that are unlikely to deliver for that individual patient, raising expectations and making talking about dying harder for doctors.

“It has made it far more difficult to ensure that we can have open and honest conversations about death and dying. One only has to see the community’s response to Atul Gawande’s book on mortality to understand that a huge number of people want to have these conversations,” Professor Currow said.

Professor Currow is speaking at the 13th Australian Palliative Care Conference as part of a plenary discussion on making palliative care fit for the future. One real way to make the leap is to encourage medical professionals to be more palliative care aware and open with their patients.

“At a community level, the real opportunity is that people want to have these conversations and we have a choice to be part of that conversation or to simply be observers on the sideline.

“If we are not actively participating, palliative care will be left behind in a community that wants to take forward those conversations,” he added.

For National Palliative Care Week in May, the theme was ‘Dying to talk; talking about dying won’t kill you’ and Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan, said it was important for all Australians to start talking about dying.

“Many Australians die in hospital, despite more than 70% wanting to die at home. As a society we owe it to each other to ensure we all get the best death possible, but we can only get there by talking about it,” Ms Callaghan said.

Conference information: 13th Australian Palliative Care Conference 1-4 September 2015, www.palliativecare.org.au/australian-palliative-care-conference.

Media contact: PCA Frith Rayner 0400 45 99 88

