



PalliativeCare
AUSTRALIA

Media Release

Monday, 21 September 2015

Alzheimer's sufferers need better access to palliative care

Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease are the second leading causes of death in Australia, but still not recognised as a terminal condition which could lead to patients missing out on vital care, says Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan.

This World Alzheimer's Day she called for better access to appropriate palliative care for Alzheimer's patients.

"Dementia is different from other terminal conditions; in part because of the long, unpredictable course of the disease, difficult issues around capacity for decision making, difficulties in communication and lack of community understanding of the disease," she said.

Because of complications such as these people with dementia may be denied access to palliative care services.

She said while palliative care services often step in as an Alzheimer patient declines, without recognition that the illness is life limiting a referral will not be immediate.

"This could result in Alzheimer's patients suffering unnecessarily at the end of their lives and also missing important opportunities to identify their wishes through an advance care plan. This could be done early in the diagnosis and act as a guide for family as they have to make decisions about their loved one's care.

"Palliative Care Australia has been encouraging Australians to talk more about death, dying and their end of life wishes. After all, talking about dying won't kill you. But unless we have those conversations we could unnecessarily and unwittingly put our families under considerable strain when they have to make choices for us, without really knowing what we want.

"Life is bookended by two main events, being born and dying. We spend a lot of time preparing for and talking about a birth, but we ignore dying, despite acknowledging its inevitability.

"By expanding the awareness and understanding of palliative care and dementia across the community and healthcare sectors, the accessibility of appropriate care for people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease will improve.

"For those Australians who have Alzheimer's and dementia there will come a time when palliative care can provide them with care that can enhance their life as they face the end of their lives. It is important that is recognised and the care made available to them," Ms Callaghan

Media contact: PCA Frith Rayner 0400 45 99 88

