



# Media Release

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## Australia needs to better support family carers

Australia's family carers are at high risk of psychological and social problems without proper support and better preparation for the role they are undertaking, a leading Australian palliative care expert says.

Professor Peter Hudson, Director of the Centre of Palliative Care at St Vincent's and The University of Melbourne, says he hopes to explore how Australia could develop a systematic approach to supporting carers as part of his Australian-American Fulbright Scholarship to the United States in early 2017.

"We know from patients that one of their top priorities as they face end of life is that their family members are not unduly burdened by their care. We owe it to them to give them peace of mind that their family carers will be well supported as they provide care but also during their bereavement. Hence if we support families then patient's quality of life can be improved.

"Our data shows that around 40% of carers for patients with palliative care needs are at risk of psychological distress and between 15% and 20% suffer significant mental health issues and have prolonged or complicated grief.

"There are parts of Australia where carers get very good support, but unfortunately there are many family carers are missing out on what palliative care can offer," he said.

Professor Hudson, PCA's Vice President, said he hoped to learn from US examples where there have been systematic improvements in the provision of support to patients and their family carers.

"In some States they are trying to legislate that a patient cannot be discharged home unless a family carer is identified and that carer is given information and guidance on what they will need to do if they take that person home. This initiative could be very relevant for Australia, so we know patients are not discharged to carers who are not properly supported."

He said generally improving Australians ability to talk about palliative care would benefit carers who are often isolated.

"The role of carers would be vastly improved if Australians were better at talking about palliative care, death and dying. That is a key message from Palliative Care Australia, to improve community awareness and general dialogue about dying."

PCA CEO Liz Callaghan said Professor Hudson's contribution to carers in Australia was significant and would be further enhanced by this scholarship.

"PCA is very fortunate to have a talented Board with keen academic interests in palliative care. It means all of our activities are underpinned by the latest research and developments in the field.

"We congratulate Professor Hudson on his Australian-American Fulbright Scholarship and look forward to seeing the results of this study benefitting all Australian carers," she said.

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The Australian-American Fulbright Scholar presentation is this evening in Melbourne

