

29 August 2007

Funding welcomed for Rural Palliative Care

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) today welcomed Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, Senator Brett Mason's commitment to funding the Rural Palliative Care Project.

The \$6.7 million announcement will allow 36 divisions of general practice in rural areas to work with health and community services to deliver palliative care in their local areas.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said each year over half a million Australians receive palliative care.

"Being diagnosed or having someone close to you diagnosed with a terminal illness is a challenging time for everyone involved. Appropriate support services are important to help reduce stress and improve quality of life.

"This funding injection will allow more people in rural and remote communities to spend their last days in familiar surrounds. Too often country Australians are forced to use services in metropolitan areas that can be far away from their families and friends," Dr Hobbs said.

Palliative care involves a team-based coordinated approach which includes GPs, nurses, allied health professionals, family, friends, pastoral carers and strong linkages to palliative care specialist. All play a very important part in caring for the physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs of the patient in the final chapter of their life.

The extension of this project follows a very successful trial ran in eight divisions of general practice. The pilot program began three years ago and has enabled many patients to die with dignity in their own communities thanks to a coordinated care approach.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said the new funding is a testament of the benefits the divisions of general practice bring to their local community.

"The Network provides a unique infrastructure that delivers local health solutions through general practice. Being able to recognise local health needs and work in partnership with existing services is integral to this program and many others.

"One example in the pilot program that highlighted the importance of a local approach allowed a gentleman in the final stages of his illness who was unable to be turned in his bed be provided with a special hospital bed. This assisted nursing staff to care for him in his home there rather than in the local or a metropolitan hospital. The man who had grown up in the area was able to look outside his bedroom window, receive visits from family and friends whilst his dog kept him company, sleeping in his room for final days.

"This funding announcement will no doubt provide many more stories such as this. We welcome the Parliamentary Secretary's announcement and are confident many rural Australians will benefit," Ms Carnell said.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266 or AGPN Media Officer Kathryn Conroy on 0416 428 678