

# A comparative study of two teaching methods used to improve the integration of the palliative approach into rural residential aged care facilities

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As our population ages Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) are caring for an older, frailer population of people with often complex co-morbid conditions. The care of this group is unique and challenging, often managed by a team that predominately consists of assistant nurses. How to ensure equitable access to excellence in palliative care remains a challenge with the Department of Health and Ageing starting to address this through releasing Guidelines for a Palliative Approach in Residential Aged Care (2006). Adopting these guidelines however is pivotal to their success and this study looked to investigate how best to integrate the palliative approach to care into rural RACFs through comparing two teaching methods (in-servicing and case conferencing).

The researcher conducted a 12 month program of in-services and case conferences across five RACFs in the Central West of NSW. She used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, employed simple comparative statistics (Chi Square), descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to inform the discussion and conclusions made.

This study demonstrates that case conferencing was more effective than in-servicing in relation to:

- Increasing and enabling clinically appropriate referrals to specialist Palliative Care services
- Increasing the understanding of the role of the specialist Palliative Care team
- Creating practice changes
- Increasing communication between team members

Palliative Care by its very nature is a broad area where people requiring such care will have unique needs, differing illness experiences and different support needs. Therefore, empowering staff to problem solve, identify issues, communicate effectively and refer for specialist support when needed will allow the successful integration of the Palliative Approach in practice. Case conferencing supports this through the development of a supportive learning environment, responsive to student need, relevant to real time practice and through fostering problem-based learning. Case conferencing seeks to empower staff with the ability to form alternate views in their workplace, to troubleshoot and discuss as a team best practice principles. It values the skill of all those in the team, is inclusive and productive, therefore ideal for a RACF setting. Case conferencing in this study was more effective than in-servicing in integrating the Palliative Approach into Rural RACFs.

*For the full report on this project visit our website below, follow the link to Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'*

Claudia is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Wellness Foundation, a not for profit organisation providing holistic care to the community in Orange, NSW. Prior to this, Claudia was a Clinical Nurse Consultant in Palliative Care with the Greater Western Area Health Service.



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