Evaluating the effectiveness of a self-directed learning package in increasing palliative care knowledge and confidence for health care workers in rural aged care facilities.

Steven Pitman, Mercy Health Albury
steven.pitman@gsahs.health.nsw.gov.au

Aim:
To test the hypothesis that a self-directed learning package would increase palliative care knowledge and confidence for Residential Aged Care Facility employees in Southern Rural New South Wales.

Method:
Thirty Three employees in 3 Aged Care Facilities undertook the completion of 3 modules of a Palliative Care self-directed learning package. Participants also completed pre-post package knowledge and confidence questionnaires as well as six month follow up testing. The research data was then analyzed via paired two-tailed T-tests.

Results:
There was a statistically significant increase in knowledge (md 1.3; sd 2.4; t 3.11; p .003) and an increase in confidence (md 0.94; sd 1.52; t 3.55; p .001) after completion of the self-directed learning package. There was evidence that knowledge increases were retained after six months (md 2.1; sd 1.94; t 4.83; p .0001). Retention of confidence after six months was not demonstrated in the research findings (md 0.7; sd 2.53; t 1.23; p 0.232).

Conclusion:
This study provided evidence that a self-directed learning can play a role in increasing knowledge and confidence in palliative care for rural aged care workers. While knowledge increases were retained after six months, confidence increases were not retained, which raises questions regarding the role of ongoing support, education and mentoring.

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Steven Pitman is a Clinical Nurse Consultant with Mercy Health in Albury. Working with rural primary health care professionals, Steven has an interest in capacity building and education in regards to care of individuals at the end of life.

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