

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Caring for Cognitive Impairment – A National Campaign

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has launched a national campaign to improve knowledge and care practices to provide better outcomes and reduce the risk of harm to people with cognitive impairment in hospital.

Patients in hospital with conditions such as dementia or delirium (conditions most commonly associated with cognitive impairment) are at much greater risk of adverse events and preventable complications, such as falls, pressure injuries, accelerated functional decline, longer lengths of stay, premature entry to residential care and even death. Despite being a common condition among hospital patients, cognitive impairment is often misdiagnosed or undetected in hospital.

Nationally, 20% of hospital patients aged over 70 have dementia and 10% of patients in this age group have delirium on admission to hospital, and patients with dementia are two times more likely to experience falls, pressure injuries or infections in hospital.

The Caring for Cognitive Impairment campaign highlights the fact that harm can be minimised if cognitive impairment is identified early and steps are taken to reduce the associated risks. It encourages everyone working in hospitals, people in the community and consumers to get involved and make a difference.

Chair of the Commission's Cognitive Impairment Advisory Group, Professor Sue Kurrle said "This campaign will lead to safety and quality improvements in caring for hospital patients with cognitive impairment across our health system. It will inform health professionals about what they can do to help achieve this and support them in playing a committed role."

"If cognitive impairment is identified and the right steps are taken early, we can minimise harm – which means health professionals, consumers and health services can all play a vital role."

The Commission's Board Chair, Professor Willis Marshall AC, said: "Cognitive impairment impedes communication, attention, memory, thinking and problem solving and so it can cause great distress for patients and their loved ones and carers. We want to harness and share the great work being done around Australia to provide the best care for patients in hospital with cognitive impairment.

"The campaign provides a significant opportunity to share information about important and useful strategies already underway, knowledge and experience which will contribute to providing high quality care for patients with cognitive impairment."

Involvement in the campaign will also help health services to prepare for the requirements of Version 2 of the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, which includes specific items relating to cognitive impairment in recognition of its importance as a safety and quality issue in Australia; and the Delirium Clinical Care Standard which is being finalised by the Commission.

Visit: www.cognitivecare.gov.au

#BetterWayToCare

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Notes to Editors:

About the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and health care organisations, our aim is to achieve a sustainable, safe and high-quality health system. As a result of its work, the Commission has an ongoing program of significant national activity with outcomes that are demonstrating direct patient benefit as well as creating essential underpinnings for ongoing improvement. The Commission aims to use its role as the national body for safety and quality in health care in Australia to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high quality care.

About the Caring for Cognitive Impairment Campaign

The Commission has developed the Caring for Cognitive Impairment campaign to improve the prevention, recognition and treatment of delirium and to provide high-quality care for people with cognitive impairment in hospitals.

Cognitive impairment, such as dementia or delirium, is common in older patients. These patients are at greater risk of adverse outcomes and preventable complications such as falls, pressure injuries and functional decline. Harm can be minimised if cognitive impairment is identified and risks acted on.

The Commission has released [A better way to care](#) resources, developed a delirium clinical care standard and included cognitive impairment in draft version two of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards, recently subject to extensive consultation. The campaign's aims to raise awareness of cognitive impairment as a quality and safety issue, to improve care and to assist hospitals prepare for the revised NSQHS Standards in 2017.

The campaign provides participants with access to a range of resources, strategies and tools for improving care to patients with cognitive impairment and creates opportunities to share success stories and helpful hints.

About cognitive impairment

Delirium

Delirium is the disturbance of consciousness, attention, cognition and perception that develops over a short period of time (usually hours or days) and tends to fluctuate during the course of the day.

Dementia

Dementia is defined as the progressive decline in cognitive function that affects memory, judgement, attention, language and problem solving.

These definitions have been sourced from Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. Delirium Care Pathways. Canberra. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2011:24.

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