

# AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

## **A better way to care for patients with cognitive impairment in hospital**

Improving the safety and quality of care for patients with cognitive impairment (dementia and delirium) is the focus of new resources launched today by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission).

Cognitive impairment is common among older people admitted to hospital. Around 30 per cent of patients in Australian hospitals who are aged over 70 have some form of cognitive impairment.

Cognitive impairment and its risks are often not recognised in hospital. These resources describe a pathway to improve the early recognition and response to patients with cognitive impairment.

The Commission's chair, Professor Willis Marshall AC, highlighted that patients in hospital who have dementia and delirium are at greater risk of harm.

"Patients with dementia are two times more likely to experience falls, pressure injuries or acquire infections while they are in hospital. They are also six times more likely to develop delirium" Professor Marshall said.

Professor Marshall described the resources, *A Better Way to Care: Safety and quality for patients with cognitive impairment (dementia and delirium) in hospital*, as a call to action for clinicians and health service managers.

"These resources call for healthcare professionals to: be alert to delirium and the risk of harm to patients; recognise and respond to patients with cognitive impairment; and provide safe and high-quality care tailored to the needs of these patients" Professor Marshall said.

President of Alzheimer's Australia, Graeme Samuel AC, said that the resources will enable healthcare professionals to make hospitals dementia-friendly.

"Across Australia there is action to create dementia-friendly communities – places where people living with dementia are supported to live a high quality of life. As so many older people with dementia are admitted to hospital, it's crucial we ensure our hospitals are also dementia-friendly", Mr Samuel said.

The resources include guides for clinicians and health service managers as well as a guide for patients and carers which outlines the care patients with cognitive impairment should receive when they are in hospital.

The Department of Social Services has funded the project as part of national changes in aged care through funding targeting improvements in the care of people with dementia in acute care.

To access to the resources visit [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/abetterwaytocare](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/abetterwaytocare) from 5 November, 2014.

### **Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care**

The Commission is a government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in safety and quality in health care across Australia. The Commission aims to support health care professionals, organisations and policy makers who work with patients and carers.

### **Project background and funding**

All state and territory health ministers have committed to improving health care of people with dementia by adopting Dementia as the 9th National Health Priority in 2012. The importance of improving the hospital experience was also recognised in the allocation of funding in the 'Tackling Dementia' stream of the Living Longer, Living Better aged care reforms, announced in 2012.

The Ministerial Dementia Advisory Group's Acute Care Forum, held in November 2012, identified a number of strategies to improve hospital care. The potential of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards were recognised as a critical lever that has been under-utilised. As a consequence, this project was funded by the Department of Social Services.

### **Media inquiries**

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