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Health Ministers endorse new approach to end-of-life care in hospitals

A new consensus statement describing the essential elements for providing safe and high-quality care at the end of life has been endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers as the national approach to the delivery of end-of-life care in Australian hospitals.

The consensus statement was launched today by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) at St Vincent's Private Hospital, Brisbane, as part of National Palliative Care Week.

In Australia, more than 50% of deaths occur in hospitals, despite surveys reporting the majority of people would prefer to die at home. Hospitals are designed for rapid assessment, treatment and discharge of patients. New models of care may be needed to consistently deliver safe and high-quality end-of-life care in these settings.

The purpose of the consensus statement is to set out the principles and elements that shape the delivery of safe and high-quality end-of-life care in hospitals and other acute health services.

Professor Willis Marshall AC, Chair of the Commission, said "Good care in the last days, weeks and months of life can help minimise the distress and grief associated with death and dying for the individual, and for their family, friends and carers. The consensus statement is an important step in improving end-of-life care in Australia."

The types of end-of-life care that a patient may need include long term symptom management to maintain quality of life, intensive family support, and physical care to maintain comfort while a person is dying.

The consensus statement brings together the views of patients, families and carers, expert opinion and published evidence to provide direction to hospitals as they work to improve their systems for looking after people at the end of their life. At the core of the consensus statement is the need to provide end-of-life care that is patient-centred and goal-directed.

The Chief Executive of Palliative Care Australia, Liz Callaghan, said "It is important that clinicians work closely with patients, families and carers to understand a patient's wishes. This ensures making informed decisions about a person's end-of-life wishes is easier on all involved in a very sad time."

The Commission has also developed an information sheet to help patients, families and carers understand how care should be provided to people at the end of life in hospitals.

Download the ***National Consensus Statement: Essential Elements for Safe and High-Quality End-of-Life Care*** and information sheet from www.safetyandquality.gov.au/endoflifecare

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.

Media inquiries

Lisa Parcsi, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
(02) 9126 3600 or lisa.parcsi@safetyandquality.gov.au

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