



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Talking about dying won't kill you... What Aussies need to know

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"Talking about dying is the last taboo, but Australians need to break it to ensure they die well", says Craig Stanbridge, CEO Sunraysia Community Health Services (SCHS). "Those closest to them need to know what their wishes are and what care they want".

It's a tough conversation, and a sad talk to have, but people should not shy away from it. Without knowing what your loved ones want, you cannot advocate for it on their behalf. Having the conversation means more people will live in the way they want until the end, with the help of palliative care.

According to Mr Stanbridge, "in Australia we prepare for births, we encourage families to have a birth plan and to prepare for the process of birth – but we ignore the other side of the birth coin, death".

Most Aussies (70%) want to die at home, but one in two deaths occur in hospital. If we do not make our wishes known to those close to us, how will anyone know to ask for things such as home or community care? This National Palliative Care Week Australians are encouraged to discuss death, dying and their wishes for end of life.

"Everyone needs to be an advocate for palliative care, it touches all of us at one point in our lives, as a carer or a patient or friend" says Lisa O'Connor, Palliative Care Clinical Nurse Consultant, SCHS. "Palliative care is not about dying it's about living. It is not just for those who are close to the end of their lives, but should be accessed from diagnosis to help people live well for as long as they can".

Noelene Rowarth, who is a current volunteer with SCHS' Palliative Care Service, can vouch for this after accessing Palliative Care services for eleven years prior to the death of her husband Laurie.

"I cannot speak highly enough of all of the Palliative Care Nursing staff at SCHS and the support that they offered", said Mrs Rowarth. "It was a tough time when my husband was diagnosed with cancer of the larynx and Palliative Care helped me through it. Talking about dying wasn't something that was common practice in the community, but it was these difficult conversations that were encouraged by Palliative Care that made our decisions easier."

Mrs Carmel Hester has also received early Palliative Care support, prior to the death of her husband. For the 8 months leading up to his death, Mrs Hester received visits from Palliative Care Nurses to



support her and her husband to develop strategies to manage the pain and other symptoms, to offer emotional support and to allow them to focus on maximising their quality of life in this difficult time.

Palliative care offers many things, including pain and symptom management, to give people as much time as possible as they live with their life limiting illness. Palliative care isn't just for the individual but also supports those people like carers, friends and family by taking care of the whole person.

"Early palliative care has been proven in some circumstances to add years to life as well as life to years for some cancer groups", said Mrs O'Connor. "While it is not the cure that everyone always hopes for, managing pain and psychosocial support for the very ill is very important".

National Palliative Care Week runs from 24-30 May 2015. This National Palliative Care Week SCHS has organised a number of events and activities to raise awareness of Palliative Care including:

- SCHS Golf Day, Friday 22 May, Red Cliffs Golf Course – All proceeds to support SCHS' Palliative Care Services
- SCHS Palliative Care Memorial Service, Sunday 24 May, Merbein Hill Corner Gardens
- SCHS Staff Acknowledgement Afternoon Tea, Monday 25 May – to recognise the valuable role staff play in providing Palliative Care Services to our community
- Palliative Care Display,
  - Thursday 28 May, Mildura Central Plaza
  - Monday 25-Friday 29 May, Mildura Base Hospital & Mildura Private Hospital
- Mel Livens, Team Leader, Community Palliative Care attending Mildura Central Plaza Walking Group, Tuesday 26 & Thursday 28 May to give a short talk on Palliative Care.

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Attached:

Photo:  
Caption: Reminiscing about their Palliative Care experience.  
L-R: Carmel Hester and Noelene Rowarth