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AMA PAYS TRIBUTE TO PALLIATIVE CARE WORKERS

At the end of a year that has seen a lot of political and community debate about end of life issues, the AMA urges community recognition and appreciation of the special work done by the doctors, nurses, other health professionals, and all workers involved in end of life care.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said today that everybody who works in palliative care does an exceptional job in caring for dying patients, their family members, and their carers.

Dr Gannon said that good quality end of life care is patient-centred, focused on the health care goals and preferences of the individual patient, and is generally multi-disciplinary, involving a range of medical professionals, nurses, and other health care professionals working throughout the medical, health, and community services.

“End of life care focuses on the patient’s entire care journey,” Dr Gannon said.

“It covers those who transition from curative care, care that is focused on extending life, to palliative care, which is focussed on symptom management, comfort, and quality of life.

“End of life care is relevant to people of all ages and across all settings of care throughout Australia.

“Australia has a magnificent palliative care workforce and sector, but more support is needed to ensure consistency of quality and access to services across the nation.

“A 2014 Grattan Institute study showed that end of life services in some areas are fragmented, and palliative care services are often insufficient or not available.

“All governments and the medical and health professions must work together to build on the dedication and success of our stressed and over-stretched palliative care sector.

“We need to ensure medical education programs, and continuing medical education, provide education and training in end of life care, including relevant clinical training; training in end of life communication with patients, family members and carers; and awareness of legal and ethical obligations.

“We need a well distributed, accessible, and appropriately trained and skilled specialist and primary health workforce to meet the needs of all people at the end of life throughout Australia.

“Doctors working in end of life care require appropriate support to address their own emotional and spiritual issues, and to promote their own health and wellbeing.

“Doctors need appropriate medico-legal protections and certainty when providing end of life care in accordance with good medical practice.

“We need nationally consistent legislation and guidance in relation to advance care planning.

“There must be ongoing research into end of life care to improve treatments and to improve skills in diagnosis and prognosis.

“And we must promote community awareness and education in relation to end of life care, palliative care, the approach to futile treatment, and the role of advance care planning.”

Dr Gannon said the best care is delivered by efficient, multidisciplinary healthcare teams.

“Access to better end of life care will be improved by better communication, continuity, and coordination of care across the sector.

“We need to reduce the ‘silo’ mentality that end of life care is not part of mainstream care,” Dr Gannon said.

The AMA wants to see a cultural shift within the medical profession so that dying is not regarded as necessarily a failure of care, and the following measures are used as the parameters for successful care:

- Did our patient have as good a quality of life as possible?
- Were their wishes, values and goals of care ascertained and respected?
- Were they supported by their health care team, whether in hospital or in the community, throughout their treatment, even as they transitioned from curative to palliative measures?
- Were their family members and carers supported as well?

The AMA *Position Statement on End of Life Care and Advance Care Planning 2014* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/end-life-care-and-advance-care-planning-2014>

The AMA *Position Statement on the Palliative Approach in Residential Aged Care Settings 2015* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/palliative-approach-residential-aged-care-2015>

22 December 2016

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