

'The D Word': Allied Health led dementia professional development

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Background: Amongst Royal Melbourne Hospital Allied Health staff, a gap was identified in the knowledge and education regarding the management of patients with dementia. In response, an Allied Health led interdisciplinary education program was implemented. The program was evaluated to identify if providing this type of education in dementia care is feasible, leads to an increase in confidence, and whether there is a need for further education.

A professional development program was developed in response to this in 2017, targeting all staff who work with patients with dementia, called 'The "D" Word: Working with people with Dementia (a multidisciplinary approach)'. Attendance was high with feedback to increase the focus of the presentations in relation to the hospital setting. A revised program was run in 2018, renamed as 'The "D" Word: Working with people with Dementia (the inpatient interdisciplinary response)'.

In 2018, 120 Allied Health and Nursing professionals attended a one-day program with presentations from: Medical, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Neuropsychology and Dietetics. Each discipline addressed specific, advertised objectives centring around evidence-based, patient-centred care for those inpatients with dementia. There was two case studies which the presentations centred around for practical application.

Results: Of the 120 attendees, 100 (83%) responded to the post-program survey. The average attendee was an Allied Health practitioner with 1 year of experience, working in the acute setting. The following was found:

- 89% felt the objectives were met
- 88.5% identified presentations as very good/excellent
- 78% rated increased confidence with the treatment of dementia
- 77% identified they would like further education in their specific field of work.
- 85% would recommend the course to their colleagues
- 19% rated the nursing presentation as excellent

The following topics were identified as requiring further exploration; palliative care, de-escalating aggressive behaviour, education of families and the carer experience.

Significance of the findings to Allied Health: Providing Allied Health led education with medical and nursing colleagues is feasible. Additional education leads to increased confidence when treating dementia and there is a conclusive need for further education in this space.

