

I would like to make a submission to your enquiry. I am a Palliative Medicine Physician in the regional centre of Toowoomba. One urgent issue is the provision of end of life Palliative Care in Nursing Home. In general Nursing Homes are not adequately staffed or funded for Palliative Care. End of life Palliative Care for a patient is a higher level of care that that required for high care nursing home patients. As there is often not enough resources at the nursing home, frequently these patients are off loaded to hospitals both public and private. It would be much more cost effective to fund an upgraded service at the Nursing Homes to manage residents in their end stage of disease. Investment would be needed in education, staff and equipment. However this would be a far cheaper option than the current situation of having to use acute facilities.

After speaking with your staff, I wish to add to my original submission. My background is first as a rural GP for 25 years. As part of my profession, I provided palliative care services to a small country community. This care was provided in the community hospital, hostel, patient's home in town or on their farm. In recent years I have retrained in the specialty of Palliative Medicine and work in the regional centre of Toowoomba.

One of the pressing issues is provision of Palliative Care ie end of life services in nursing homes. While it is true that all nursing home patients should be treated with palliative intent ie focusing on quality of life and symptom management, it is a much bigger job to care for a dying patient. Nursing homes often have many high care patients. Normal care for these patients is often very demanding. When it comes time for them to die, many nursing home do not have the resources in number of staff, adequately trained staff and equipment to deal with this phase of disease.

Each part of the health service only looks at its isolated budget as this is what we are responsible for. When a palliative patient is referred to a hospital from a nursing home, this is often done due to lack of funds to provide proper care. Nobody looks at the fact this cost saving for the nursing home costs many times this saving to the local public or private hospital.

Palliative Care especially end of life care costs money. However it would be much more cost effective to provide the end of life care for nursing home patients in their nursing home. The majority of patients from nursing homes who I interview would much prefer to be cared for at the nursing home. To do this primary care staff at the nursing home have to be empowered through education and training to provide such care. I believe funding of this would inevitably be a huge cost saving for the commonwealth. General Practitioners as well must be funded in education and service provision.

Australia has an ageing population. Palliative Care must be provided in the community; in homes and nursing homes as much as possible. Using acute care facilities is an expensive and unvianle option.

Yours faithfully  
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