

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

'High touch' Dementia Care

Professor Esther Chang of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and her colleagues Ms Amanda Johnson and Dr Daniel Nicholls lead a team of aged-care professionals, researching alternative protocols for people with end-stage dementia (ESD). This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through its Local Palliative Care Grants Program.

'For people experiencing end-stage dementia, "high-tech" medical treatments are not necessarily appropriate,' explains Professor Chang. 'The situation is complicated by difficult or inadequate communication between medical staff, care staff and families about the needs of their relative and the care options available. Owing to a lack of understanding of the condition, people with ESD are often admitted to hospital via the emergency department when they should not be. We are developing alternative protocols to current ESD care practices in residential aged care facilities that are sustainable, beneficial and respectful while maintaining the comfort of the residents.'

A program developed by Associate Professor Simard – *The End-of-Life Namaste Care* – will be trialled and evaluated in several residential aged-care facilities across Sydney and the South Coast. The program provides comfort and pleasure to residents with ESD using "high touch" sensory experiences such as soothing music, aromatherapy, plants, realistic stuffed animals, quilts and companionship. Sessions will be held to explain ESD and the program to families of the residents. A decision-tree will be developed for the primary care providers to guide ESD symptom control. Carer skills, knowledge and resources will be developed.

In further enhancing the delivery of care provided by professional carers, the program seeks to improve residents' quality of life in aged care facilities at a critical phase in their life.



This innovation will reduce stress experienced by families and staff, and contribute to a more comfortable and peaceful experience for the dying resident, honouring their final stage of life.

Project Title: Avoiding "high tech" through "high touch" in end stage dementia: Protocol for care at the end of life.

Funding has been set at: \$386,791

Contact Details: e.chang@uws.edu.au

<http://www.uws.edu.au/nursing>

August 2010

Team Partners:

Associate Professor Joyce Simard, Geriatric Consultant, USA
Sydney West Area Health Service
Domain Principal Aged Care
Australasian Aged Care Pty Ltd

Additional Project Support:

South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Health Service Palliative Care Service, Manly Warringah Division of General Practice, Northern Beaches Palliative Care Service, Wentwest.