

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Caring and Social Capital

Dr Debbie Horsfall from the School of Social Sciences and Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard from the Social Justice Social Change Research Group are exploring the effects of how caring for the elderly and terminally ill can contribute to the growth of relationships within a community. This research has been funded by NSW Department of Ageing, Disability & Home Care (DADHC).

'Caring for the elderly or terminally ill is often linked with feelings of seclusion and lack of engagement with other family members and the community, which can impact on relationships and social capital', says Dr Horsfall. 'As social capital depends on social inclusion, we will be investigating how caring for the elderly and terminally ill can provide benefits for both client and carer through different activities, events and relationship building and how it can make life more fulfilling for carers, elderly clients, their family and friends.'

This qualitative study involves two stages. For the first stage, elderly clients, their carers and care staff from Care Centres will be given a camera to take pictures of significant caring events, relationships or tasks that take place over a three week period. For the next stage, a selection of these photographs will be discussed in an informal group interview in order to identify the varieties of support and caring activities that have been experienced. A network map will be developed with clients, carers and staff of these centres to show how caring can develop community networks and relationships. This process will then be repeated with elderly people who live at home and who receive home care services and finally with carers who have supported a loved one in end of life care. Selected photos and accompanying short narratives will be exhibited at the conclusion of the research.



The benefit of this research is that caring for the elderly or terminally ill may no longer be seen as an isolating or negative experience and strong relationships, and social networks for individuals can provide social and health benefits for everyone involved.

Project Title: Active engagement of older people in the community: Mapping and developing the caring networks of older people receiving DADHC and Home Hospice services

Funding has been set at: \$97,980

Contact Details: d.horsfall@uws.edu.au

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

February 2010