

Significant benefits of pastoral care confirmed in new report

A new report by researchers at Australian Catholic University (ACU) confirms the significant benefits of pastoral care to hospital patients and aged care residents.

While those working in this area know intuitively that pastoral care practitioners provide hospital patients and aged care residents with support that enhances their wellbeing, there is surprisingly little research into this important area of care.

This unique Australian research project sought to better understand the perspectives of people who receive support from pastoral care practitioners.

Released on Tuesday 20 November, the findings will have impact for understanding and improving services, recognising and acknowledging the contribution this dedicated group of professionals make to the wellbeing of the community, and demonstrating the benefits of care in order to retain and expand funding for the provision of services.

The report, *What are the benefits of Pastoral Care to hospital patients and aged care residents?*, adds to the emerging literature on the impact of pastoral care in hospital and aged care settings. A total of 728 people from across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia shared their views on the pastoral care they had received in hospital or aged care settings.

Overwhelmingly, participants indicated that they perceived considerable benefits from engaging with a pastoral care practitioner. Participants were asked five questions about the quality of this care.

Almost all (99 per cent) of participants reported that during their meetings with the pastoral practitioner they felt they were treated with dignity and respect, and more than 90 per cent said they felt that they were listened to, were able to talk about what was on their mind, had their situation understood, and had their faith/beliefs valued.

Participants were asked five questions about the benefits of the pastoral care they received. More than three-quarters reported that “often” or “all of the time” after meeting with the practitioner they felt they were able to be honest with themselves about how they were really feeling, they had a positive outlook on their situation, they felt in control of their life, they felt peaceful and they did not feel anxious.

Through open-ended questions participants also shared their thoughts about the most helpful aspect of their experience.

They noted the caring, supportive and empathetic presence of the pastoral care practitioner, and commented on the value of feeling listened to, being able to freely express their emotions, and feeling encouraged and uplifted by their time with the pastoral care practitioner. Participants also said that the pastoral care practitioner met specific needs, including their spiritual needs, friendship/social support needs, and practical needs.

ACU Pro Vice-Chancellor of Engagement Professor Sandra Jones said, “The results demonstrate that participants perceive considerable benefits from engaging with a pastoral care practitioner, including aspects of care that are not provided by other services.”

A key strength of the study was its cross-organisational context and large sample, enabling the benefits and impact of pastoral care to be explored across a diverse range of organisations and participants. Participants were patients and residents from six organisations: BaptCare, Cabrini, Mercy Health, Southern Cross Care Vic, St John of God, and Villa Maria Catholic Homes.

Professor Jones said, “The quality of the study was underpinned by deep and meaningful engagement of the University research team with the individuals and organisations who provide this important, but often undervalued, aspect of health and aged care.”

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