



SENATOR THE HON BRETT MASON

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

18 June 2007

BM 19/07

New guidelines for communicating end-of-life issues

Australian health practitioners now have new guidelines to help them discuss end-of-life issues with palliative care patients and their families.

Clinical practice guidelines for communicating prognosis and end-of-life issues with adults in the advanced stages of a life-limiting illness, and their caregivers was launched today by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Brett Mason, at Parliament House, Canberra.

The document was developed by a team from Sydney and Flinders Universities, led by Dr Josephine Clayton, and funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

The guidelines were published today as a special supplement to the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

“Terminal prognosis and end-of-life issues are difficult topics for patients, health professionals and their families,” Senator Mason said.

“But discussion is essential in order to make plans for remaining life and to prepare for death.

“Of course, any such discussions must take into account the emotions and concerns of all parties as well as the facts.

“The guidelines not only outline best practice in communicating about these issues, but also cover practical issues such as likely symptoms and how they are treated, and what will happen close to death.

“I am confident that these guidelines will prove to be extremely valuable to health professionals and the community,” he said.

An estimated 77,000 Australians die each year from a terminal illness.

The NHMRC and the Department of Health and Ageing are currently cooperating on a national Palliative Care Research Program to improve the quality of palliative care. The program commenced in 2000 and will continue to 2010. Applications for \$3.5 million worth of research grants were recently approved, and I will be announcing the successful applicants shortly.

The *Clinical practice guidelines for communicating prognosis and end-of-life issues with adults in the advanced stages of a life-limiting illness, and their caregivers* are available from the Medical Journal of Australia website http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/186_12_180607/cla11246_fm.html

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