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Walking in Another's Shoes

The South Island dementia workforce will soon benefit from a new training initiative that encourages a person-centred model of dementia care.

Called "Walking in Another's Shoes", the new programme is under the governance of the South Island Health of Older People Service Level Alliance (HOPSLA). A member of that alliance, aged care psychiatrist Dr Matthew Croucher, is involved in setting up the new training programme.

Dr Croucher says the Walking in Another's Shoes training will provide dementia staff with new skills and a new sense of job satisfaction.

"Person-centred care in dementia can stand alongside the medical model of care. Maintaining personhood for someone living with dementia is about maintaining a positive sense of 'who I am', as well as helping other people to have a positive view of the person in spite of the presence of dementia," he says.

"It focuses on a person's abilities rather than their disabilities. It maintains hopeful goals in rehabilitation as well as pragmatic goals around support and minimising harm. For example, someone with dementia may not be able to remember what your name is but they may be a rich source of stories about the past that interest and delight both them and us; a nuisance can become a therapeutic tool."

Walking in Another's Shoes teaches the dementia caregiver to view challenging behaviour as a communication of un-met needs. But it's not just about the patient, the training programme also has a strong focus on caring for the carer.

Walking in Another's Shoes has already started in Canterbury and on the West Coast and is popular with staff working in dementia care facilities. "Staff feel like they are doing better and there are also good measures of the programme's effectiveness," Dr Croucher says. All five South Island district health boards have agreed to continue with or introduce Walking in Another's Shoes in the coming year, as well as some North Island regions.

Walking in Another's Shoes involves two separate training programmes. The first is aimed at workers who don't have high-level formal qualifications. This group includes health care assistants, enrolled nurses, and carers. It is an eight-month course with monthly classroom sessions and individual tuition in the workplace.

The second is aimed at staff with high level professional qualifications. This group includes registered nurses and nurse managers. It is an open-ended programme with a focus on peer review and support. Both programmes are evolving and getting better over time in response to the feedback of the participants.

Dr Croucher says Walking in Another's Shoes does not aim to compete with other aged care training programmes, but complements them with its specific focus on person-centred care for people with dementia. It will help to enable people with dementia to be managed at lower formal levels of care for longer periods.

The South Island HOPSLA group is also planning a stock take of dementia services in the South Island, led by the South Island Dementia Initiative. This will help detect any significant gaps, inequities in access and gaps in training. It will also highlight good ideas that can be shared across the region.

What are HOPSLA and the South Island Alliance?

The Health of Older People Service Level Alliance is known as HOPSLA. It is one of the work streams of the South Island Alliance, which brings together experts from across the South Island to provide governance and direction to health services.

The South Island Health Alliance is a partnership between the five South Island district health boards (DHBs) and is working to support a clinically and financially sustainable South Island health system where services are as close to people's homes as possible.

Alliance initiatives are grouped into six work streams or Service Level Alliances, which are the Southern Cancer Network, Child Health, Health of Older People, Mental Health, Information Services, and Support Services.

HOPSLA is chaired by GP Jenny Keightley from Christchurch and its members include clinical experts, DHB representatives, an aged care sector representative and an older person's advocate. Members come from throughout the South Island and have many years of experience in providing health services for older people.

The HOPSLA members started meeting last year and are currently working on several initiatives to improve older people services across the South Island. In 2011/12 the group is working to:

- Develop a common approach to restorative service delivery of community services. This is to ensure all older people services are broadly taking the same approach.
- Roll out the InterRAI assessment tool across all South Island DHBs. This is the tool used to assess an older person's need for support and services such as personal care or domestic help in the home.

- Standardize the eligibility criteria and processes for entry to services across the South Island. This is to ensure that older people receive the same access to services no matter where they live.
- Implement the South Island Dementia Initiative. This includes a new training programme for the dementia workforce that encourages the maintenance of “personhood” as a primary goal for people with dementia.
- Develop a work plan focussed on priority areas across older people services.

For more information about Walking in Another’s Shoes contact the Coordinator, Maia Scott, 03 337 7997 or 027 382 6590 or maria.scott@cdhb.govt.nz

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