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Rural Palliative Care Project program offers patients options

The quality of life of terminally ill rural patients will be enhanced by funding which enables them to remain in their communities and with their families at the end of life says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

The Rudd Government today announced a further \$3 million to support the Rural Palliative Care Program which has been running across Australia for the past two years.

The program, which is run out of 35 general practice networks around Australia, supports General Practitioners (GPs) to provide patients with care options at home and in their community.

"Quality care at the end of life for all is an important aspiration for a compassionate society, yet it is a service that, without a program such as this, will be denied to many who live in rural and remote areas.

"Often the issue for rural patients is that specialised palliative care needs to be provided in hospitals or larger centres rather than where they have lived all their lives. If you ask terminally ill patients what they want in their care, it's to be at home. This program helps patients to be at home in the final stages of their illness," Dr Djakic said.

GPs want to learn more about and deliver excellent palliative care to their patients but they are time poor, have variable training and the system does not always support good care models, he said.

"The program has made care more accessible to patients, improved access to a wide range of health service providers and enabled flexibility in service provision to meet patient needs through developing links between existing services. It offers a variety of quality care services, like a nurse who can help patients negotiate the health system and work with GPs to facilitate a good care plan for patients in their final stages of life or connecting GPs and patients to specialist services," said Dr Djakic.

While the program has proven successful where it has been implemented, the additional funding will ensure the progress made in team working, service provision and training are embedded and sustainable in rural areas so future patients will continue to benefit from it.

"Death is something we all face, with those around us and ultimately individually, so good training, a guide for patients through the system and additional support offered by general practice networks ensure patients have the best death they can.

"Patients deserve the right to die where they have lived, not be sent to larger centres or cities far from their homes and their loved ones. This program provides the support needed to give our patients options to see out their last days at home," Dr Djakic said.

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