

Media release

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New eLearning package supports timely diagnosis of dementia

With the number of New Zealanders living with dementia expected to triple by 2050, timely diagnosis and effective management of dementia is a key priority for our health system.

A new online dementia education resource has been created to support GPs and practice nurses to build confidence, competence and consistency in assessing, diagnosing and managing mild cognitive impairment and dementia. The *eLearning Dementia Education Resource for GPs and Practice Nurses* has been a collaborative development between primary, secondary and tertiary levels of care, and Alzheimers NZ, and based on the latest dementia research. It is supported by the four regional alliances and is available across New Zealand.

Worldwide evidence has shown that collaboration between primary and secondary care provides for the most effective service for people with cognitive impairment. This was recognised by the Ministry of Health in 2013, when the New Zealand Framework for Dementia Care was released to support dementia education and enable an integrated health and social support system.

Dementia is a progressive condition and requires a comprehensive care plan that includes consideration of future needs, says Dr Phil Wood, Chief Advisor, Ministry of Health and Geriatrician at Waitemata and Waikato DHBs. “Integrated care allows early diagnosis and management to occur in the community, which frees up specialist services to respond to the needs of primary care and patients. This all contributes to assisting people with dementia and their family and whānau carers to live well with dementia.”

In 2013/2014, Waitemata DHB developed and piloted a Cognitive Impairment Pathway to test a model of care for the assessment, diagnosis and management of mild cognitive impairment and dementia in general practice, the results of which have heavily informed the new dementia education resource. Dr John Cameron, GP at Westmere Medical Centre in Auckland, was the Primary Health Care lead for the pilot. “In the past, we relied heavily on specialists for the diagnosis of dementia and cognitive impairment, when in fact that may not always have been the best approach.” Dr Cameron says. “Diagnosing in primary care means people with dementia can access the right support earlier and that leads to a more acceptable management process for the whole family.”



*Dr John Cameron, GP,
Westmere Medical Centre*

He says the new resource enables GPs and practice nurses to deliver better care to people presenting with cognitive difficulties. “Dementia is a long-term condition that occurs within the community and we need to be well resourced in

primary care to not only diagnose, but also effectively and competently look after people who are diagnosed, as well as their families. This new resource is a very useful and worthwhile education opportunity, particularly for those who have a practice with a high elderly population.

“It provides GPs with a framework to follow so we feel more comfortable discussing what can be a very difficult diagnosis to hear, for both the patient and the family – it’s a whole whānau process. We are talking about a person, not a disease.”

The Dementia Education Resource is free to use and has been accredited by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners with five maintenance of professional standards (MOPS) points or five continuing professional development (CPD) hours. It includes a wide range of information about dementia, including forgetfulness, what is mild cognitive impairment, diagnostic work-up, and legal implications.

The *eLearning Dementia Education Resource for GPs and Practice Nurses* is now available via the Goodfellow Unit – an online continuing education service for general practitioners, nurses and other health professionals. The official launch of the resource will take place at the 2017 Goodfellow Annual Symposium in Auckland on Saturday, 25 March.