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ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE & DEMENTIA

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Benefits of the Treehouse program at Kyneton District Health

Background & Aim: The Treehouse program commenced in April 2017. The aim is to provide a client driven, evidence-based program run in a socially supportive environment for people living in the community with more advanced dementia and other life impacting illnesses. Clients attend a group for 5 hours per-week with specialist nursing staff and volunteers and participate in activities aimed at promoting independence and living well. Client's individual needs, interests and skills are utilized to run the group to ensure that every session is person centered.

Method: An evaluation of the impact and success of the program was undertaken in July and September 2017. General feedback was collected by staff on a weekly basis and surveys were conducted with both clients and carers focusing on measuring satisfaction with the program, impact on behaviors of concern (in dementia clients), impact on overall client general health and the impact of the program on carer stress levels and overall carer health.

Result: Careers reported a high level of satisfaction with the tree house: 85% rated it as excellent; 15% as very good. A positive change in behavior or mood concerns, they had prior to joining the program. There is an increase in overall happiness of the clients, improved sleep patterns, increased oral intake, improved socialization outside of the program, improvement in overall quality of life for both the client and the carer. 86% of careers reported their own health and wellbeing had improved. 86% believe that attending the program has meant the client has been able to live at home for longer. 100% reported an improvement in the clients' overall quality of life. Staff identified four clients requiring a medical review for either infection or medication review, potentially preventing further deterioration or hospitalization.

Conclusion: The Treehouse program provides positive benefits for the carers and improves quality of life and wellbeing for people living at home with dementia or other life-impacting illness. Participants can continue living at home for longer and show improvements in mood, oral intake, sleep patterns and behaviors of concern. Treehouse participation reduces carer stress.

Biography

Kathryn Kirby is a Registered Nurse with 14 years' experience in the Acute Hospital Setting. Her specialties include medical nursing, palliative care and dementia care, where she has worked in clinical, management and project roles. She has received a Postgraduate qualification in Leadership and Management and Dementia care. In 2014, she was awarded the Hesta Australian Nursing Team Innovation award for the understanding dementia program aimed at educating non-clinical staff and volunteers about dementia and communicating with patients with dementia. Her role as Coordinator at the Treehouse Program has allowed her to utilize her innovative thinking and leadership skills to develop a program that is truly person centered, client driven and unique with proven positive effects for both clients and carers.

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