

# CONNECTIONS

The magazine of Occupational Therapy Australia, the peak body representing occupational therapy in Australia

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## Connecting with Peers in the Allied Health Sector



**Five Things to Consider Before  
Starting your Own Practice**

**Teamwork Makes the Dreamwork**

**Animal Assisted Therapy in  
Occupational Therapy**

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Occupational  
Therapy AUSTRALIA 

DISCOVER THE BENEFITS OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

# CareSearch and palliAGED

## Helping occupational therapists work with people at the end of life

**Susan Gravier**, Research Associate, CareSearch, Flinders University

**Dr Deidre Morgan**, Lecturer, Palliative and Supportive Services, Flinders University

**E**merging evidence highlights the important role that occupational therapists have in palliative care.<sup>(1)</sup>

A growing population with palliative care needs requires that all health professionals develop palliative care competencies—it is no longer the remit of specialised clinicians. Occupational therapists routinely provide support to older people approaching their natural end of life (with or without chronic conditions) and increasingly work in a range of settings with people who have specific end-of-life care needs.<sup>(2,3)</sup>

Palliative care is active and supportive care that seeks to enable people to live as actively as possible and to prepare the person and their family and carers for death.<sup>(8)</sup>

Occupational therapists who work with people at the end of life have several key roles.<sup>(9)</sup> By helping clients identify goals and priorities,<sup>(11)</sup> occupational therapists promote engagement in meaningful activities that enable maintenance of social relationships and foster a sense of ability, dignity and control.<sup>(4,7,10,12)</sup> Supporting engagement in everyday occupations also promotes adjustment to functional decline and losses that accompanies life limiting illnesses.<sup>(5)</sup> Helping people prepare for imminent death may include supporting occupations, including legacy making, teaching a partner how to

manage finances post-death or planning what clothes to wear in the coffin.<sup>(4)</sup>

At the end of life there are many important individual, personal, professional decisions and choices to be made. Access to reliable and relevant information supports people to make these sometimes-difficult choices and decisions.

CareSearch<sup>(14)</sup> and palliAGED<sup>(15)</sup> are online resources that collate and consolidate evidence-based information and resources into accessible language and formats for clinicians, patients, carers and families. Funded by the Commonwealth Government, CareSearch provides evidence-based palliative care information across the lifespan and across the health system. PalliAGED provides this information for the aged care sector. In each, the perspectives of health and care professionals, and of patients, carers, and their families are considered, and the materials are tailored to meet their needs.

To support occupational therapists<sup>(16)</sup> working in any setting caring for a

person with palliative care needs, the Allied Health section<sup>(17)</sup> of CareSearch offers information, tools and resources. The Allied Health home page features a tab that links to introductory pages of information and resources for allied health professionals to inform care or to offer to people in their care. For those who are new to CareSearch, starting with these pages can help build confidence in using evidence to inform and improve practice.

Continuing professional development (CPD) helps occupational therapists maintain and improve their knowledge and professional skills.<sup>(18)</sup> Allied health eLearning resources<sup>(19)</sup> in CareSearch's Education section are for independent learning rather than prescribed or formal learning.

CareSearch also hosts a Research Studies Register<sup>(20)</sup>—a database of Australian research projects and studies in palliative care. Anyone can search this database for current palliative care research activities, and those involved

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in research can add their study details to the register. Project completion or publication of the research findings are not requirements for inclusion in this database. palliAGED has also identified and published current gaps in the evidence<sup>(21)</sup> which may stimulate ideas for research in an area of need.

Palliative Perspectives<sup>(22)</sup> presents blogs on various topics written by allied health contributors in order to showcase allied health clinical stories and viewpoints. You may wish to start by reading the article *When the small things become extraordinarily important*.<sup>(23)</sup>

CareSearch welcomes written pieces from occupational therapists about interesting case studies, presentations or opinion pieces that highlight occupational therapy approaches to care at the end of life. CareSearch is also interested in hearing of research conducted by occupational therapists in palliative care. For contributions of stories from the field or research projects or presentations, please contact CareSearch.

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