

\$1.5 million to improve patient-provider communication in NT hospitals

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The Communicate Study, led by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), was today awarded a five-year major investment of \$1.5 million from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to improve patient-provider communication at Royal Darwin, Gove and Katherine District Hospitals.

This highly competitive NHMRC Partnership Grant is a collaboration between NT Aboriginal leaders, NT Health, the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters and Menzies researchers.

Chief investigator, Menzies Senior Clinical Research Fellow, Professor Anna Ralph says the cultural and linguistic diversity of the NT means the region is well placed to be a world leader in culturally safe communication which will result in better health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples.

“Communication in health is always challenging but it is even more challenging when you’re from a different cultural and language background to your patient. Most health providers, like me, are non-Indigenous and up to 70 per cent of hospitalised people are Aboriginal. We want to provide high-quality care for Aboriginal peoples, but don’t necessarily know what it takes,” Prof Ralph said.

“This partnership grant ensures our internationally recognised research can be translated into practice which will set a new standard in health communication.

“Culturally unsafe care and poor patient-provider communication has been linked to poorer health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and even death. Healthcare providers and systems have a major part to play to turn these statistics around.”

The partners will focus on two key areas: improving uptake of Aboriginal interpreters in NT health services and also delivering cultural safety education which includes the multi-award-winning podcast ‘Ask the Specialist: Larrakia, Tiwi and Yolngu stories to inspire better healthcare’.

Larrakia Elder, and podcast “specialist”, Aunty Bilawara Lee says the podcasts are crucial to improving cultural safety in the hospital environment.

“The knowledge shared in these podcasts must be communicated as widely as possible so that the health workforce is better prepared to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have to enter the western medical system,” Aunty Bilawara said.

Mark Painting, Chief Executive Officer from partner organisation the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, says interpreters are essential to the delivery of culturally safe healthcare.

“By working to create a culturally safe workplace and supporting career pathways for Aboriginal interpreters, we hope to improve the supply of appropriately certified interpreters for hospitals,” Mr Painting said.

Study partner Allison Grierson, Regional Executive Director, Top End, NT Health, says the Communicate Study Partnership will provide evidence for scalable, translatable approaches.

“We are excited about the opportunities this partnership creates. We all share one goal: to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples in the NT,” Ms Grierson said.

For more information about The Communicate Study visit:

https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Projects/Primary_health_care/The_Communicate_Study/

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses, Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.