Increasing understanding of palliative care in Aboriginal Health Workers
The PEPA Western Australia Story

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We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this Land.

We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present and offer our acknowledgment and respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are present.
What is PEPA?
Program of Experience in the Palliative Approach

- Provides learning opportunities for health professionals to improve their knowledge, skills and confidence when working with people with chronic, advanced or life limiting illnesses.

- PEPA Offers:
  - Mentored placements
  - Palliative approach workshops
  - Indigenous resources

Cancer and Palliative Care

- Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Aboriginal people

- Aboriginal people are less likely to participate in cancer screening programs

- More likely to be diagnosed when cancer is at an advanced stage
Aboriginal Australians accessing palliative care

Aboriginal people are underrepresented when it comes to accessing palliative care services. For example, 1400 patients were referred to specialist palliative care services in regional WA in 2015, with only 7.8% identified as Aboriginal (WA Cancer and Palliative Care Network, 2015).

Challenges and barriers for Aboriginal people accessing palliative care services include;
- Cultural, language, geographic differences
- Lack of cultural appropriate services
- Lack of information on available service
- History and negative experience

These factors may contribute to Aboriginal Australians being referred to palliative care services in the very late stages of their illness or not at all (O’Brien, et al 2013).

Aboriginal Health Workers are an important link between the patient & palliative care

“The presence of Aboriginal Health Worker’s is perceived as a positive solution to reduce the sense of fear and alienation for Indigenous people, which is especially important during the sensitive and distressing time of coping with terminal illness.”

(Pam McGrath, et al 2007)
PEPA WA 2011 – 2016

- 23 PEPA placements
- 15 Aboriginal Health Professional Workshops
- 4 Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Workshops

Placements & Workshops in WA
Participant feedback after completing PEPA Education

“When the palliative approach should start and the importance of helping the family to understand the approach”

“Family meetings have improved and advanced care plans”

“Go out with the community nurse, be that liaison person”
Challenges in Western Australia

- Remoteness of Western Australia
- Employer’s unable to release staff to attend a 2 day PEPA placement
- Engaging AHW participants in placements
- Culturally appropriate resources available

Why Aboriginal Health Worker’s need to be involved in the palliative care journey?
Quote from PEPA participant

“I believe that a palliative care patient may have a finite time frame, but that time is a journey, just as everyone else’s life is a journey, and it should be filled with quality, love and laughter for all to remember, so that when the end is near everyone can accept that it has been a wonderful life, and all care and courtesy is given to everyone in the final days or hours and even after death. Respect is incredibly important”

(Aboriginal Health Worker)

References
- Cancer Australia 2015. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Framework background paper, Cancer Australia, Surry Hills, NSW
- Closing The Gap progress and priorities report (2016)

Acknowledgements
- Cancer & Palliative Care Network Western Australia
- Palliative & Supportive Care Education Team, Cancer Council WA
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For further information on PEPA Education in Australia please go to www.pepaeducation.com