

Research into Practice:  
Volunteers improving person centred  
dementia care in a rural hospital  
An Intervention Study

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## Abstract

Older patients with cognitive impairment are known to experience fear, anxiety and increased confusion when admitted to the hospital environment. They are more susceptible to falls, functional decline, prolonged length of stay, premature nursing home placement and death. Staff stress and care burden can be greatly increased in the care of confused hospitalised older patients with lack of time to support the necessary emotional care and safety needs highlighted. In rural areas with high ageing populations and limited or no access to geriatrician support these issues are more pronounced. Evidence for sustainable person centred models of care for people with cognitive impairment in hospitals is lacking. Increasingly the use of volunteers has been promoted as a supportive adjunct to care for patients with dementia or delirium but empirical support in the use of volunteer interventions for this patient group is lacking.

The primary aim of the study was to establish and train a group of volunteers in a person centred care approach to supporting patients with cognitive impairment in a rural hospital and evaluate outcomes for patients, staff and volunteers. Sub aims were to describe the structure and reach of the volunteer intervention, the acceptability of the intervention by nursing staff and volunteers, as well as to determine resources for replication.

The volunteer intervention provided one to one emotional support aimed at enhancing the psychological wellbeing for patients with cognitive impairment as well as practical assistance aimed at reducing delirium risk and adverse outcomes. The intervention was conducted over two shifts five days/week. The morning shift was from 8am – 12.30pm and the afternoon shift was from 3pm – 7pm.

The intervention study used a quasi-experimental control group design. The volunteer intervention was implemented over a six month period at a rural hospital (intervention) with

comparison of outcomes at a different but similar sized rural hospital (control). Measures included patient outcome data, staff and volunteer dementia/delirium knowledge and attitudes to dementia questionnaires and post program acceptability by staff and volunteers.

The volunteer program was highly accepted with 96% of staff and 100% of volunteers perceiving the program as having a beneficial effect on patient outcomes and should continue. Staff felt supported and assisted in their care of patients, and volunteers perceived what they were doing was worthwhile and beneficial to patient outcomes. No significant difference was found in the patient outcomes analysed. There were limitations in these results as the patient groups were not matched on all variables. The volunteer program is now continuing 30 months post implementation, has won two health excellence awards and has been included as an example of existing good hospital practice in the New South Wales Health (Australia) Dementia Services Planning Framework 2010-2015. Replication of the program is occurring in other areas.

This research addresses gaps in the literature related to both the need for intervention studies in care of patients with dementia in acute care and the use of structured volunteer programs in supporting patients with cognitive impairment. In doing so, it adds to the existing body of literature by providing a detailed description of an innovative intervention for improving acute care of patients with dementia. Additionally, it provides an intervention which has proved to be sustainable with minimal resources. Further research is needed in evaluating patient outcomes based on this model.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ALZNSW</b>	Alzheimer's New South Wales
<b>ACEU</b>	Aged Care Evaluation Unit
<b>ANOVA</b>	Analysis of Variance
<b>ASET/AARC</b>	Aged Service Emergency Team/Acute to Age related Care
<b>BPSD</b>	Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia
<b>BVS</b>	Bega Valley Shire
<b>CAM</b>	Confusion Assessment Method
<b>CNC</b>	Clinical Nurse Consultant
<b>CNS</b>	Clinical Nurse Specialist
<b>CSP</b>	Clinical Service Plan
<b>DAS</b>	Dementia Advisory Service
<b>E</b>	Evening shift
<b>ED</b>	Emergency Department
<b>EBIT</b>	Evidence Based Practice Identification Tool
<b>FTE</b>	Full Time Equivalent
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>GSAHS</b>	Greater Southern Area Health Service
<b>HDR</b>	Higher Degree Research
<b>HELP</b>	Helping Elder Life Program
<b>IC</b>	Infection Control
<b>ICU</b>	Intensive Care Unit

<b>LGA</b>	Local Government Area
<b>LOS</b>	Length of Stay
<b>M</b>	Morning shift
<b>MO</b>	Medical Officer
<b>MPS</b>	Multi Purpose Service
<b>MR</b>	Medical Record
<b>N</b>	Night shift
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>NUM</b>	Nurse Unit Manager
<b>PAR</b>	Participatory Action Research
<b>PCC</b>	Person Centred Care
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment
<b>RN</b>	Registered Nurse
<b>SED</b>	State Electoral Commission
<b>SMMSE</b>	Standardised Mini Mental State Examination

## Conference Presentations and Awards

### Conference presentations

1. Bateman, C. (30 April, 2010). *A pilot volunteer program to improve care of patients with dementia in a rural hospital*. Paper presented at the Change Champions ‘Who’s Challenging Behaviour’ Conference. Sydney, Australia.
2. Bateman, C. (15 June, 2010). *A Volunteer program to improve care of patients with dementia in a rural hospital*. Paper presented at the 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial Hammond Care International Dementia Conference, Sydney, Australia.
3. Bateman, C., & Williams, B. (23-24 September, 2010). *Research into Practice: Volunteers improving Dementia Care in a Rural Hospital*. Poster presented at the 2010 National Dementia Research Forum. Surfers Paradise, Australia.
4. Bateman, C. (4-5 November, 2010). *Research into Practice: A Volunteer program to improve care of patients in a rural hospital*. Paper presented at the NSW Rural and Remote Health Care Conference, Albury, Australia.
5. Bateman, C., & Williams, B. (18-20 May 2011). *Doing things differently: Volunteers improving rural hospital dementia care*. Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> National Alzheimer’s Conference, Brisbane, Australia.
6. Bateman, C. (30 March 2011). *Research into Practice: Volunteers improving Dementia care in a Rural Hospital*. Poster presented at the Intergenerational Aged care Forum. University of Canberra.
7. Bateman, C. (7 June 2011). *Research into Practice: Volunteers improving Dementia care in a Rural Hospital*. Poster presented at the Canberra Health Annual Research Meeting. The Canberra Hospital.

8. Bateman, C. (14 October, 2011). *Volunteers improving person centred dementia care in a rural hospital*. Paper presented at the NSW Health Excellence Awards Expo. Sydney, Australia.
9. Bateman, C. (18-19 November, 2011). *Research into Practice: Volunteers improving person centred dementia care in a rural hospital*. Paper presented at the Australian Psychological Association (APA), Psychology and Ageing Interest Group Conference, Melbourne. Australia.

### **Awards and peer acknowledgement**

- NSW Dementia Services Framework 2010-2015 (2010, p. 51). *A Hospital Volunteer Program to Improve Care of Patients with Dementia*. Summary of the program included as an example of existing good practice in hospital.
- United States Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Innovations Exchange database (July 2010). Profile of the volunteer program and research outcomes.  
<http://www.innovations.ahrq.gov/content.aspx?id=3109>
- Bateman, C., & Williams, B. (9 July 2011). *Volunteers improving Person Centred Care in a Rural Hospital*. Recipient of two Southern NSW Local Health District Health 2011 Health Excellence Awards. (1) Volunteer Service category; (2) Chief Executive Officer Award.
- Bateman, C., & Williams, C., (14 October). *Volunteers improving Person Centred Care in a Rural Hospital*. Selected as a finalist in the 2011 NSW Health Excellence Awards.