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Start a conversation about ‘What matters most?’ during Palliative Care Week

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) is encouraging families, friends and carers to have a conversation in Palliative Care Week (May 20-26) about ‘What matters most?’

The theme addresses the need for people in the Illawarra Shoalhaven to plan ahead for their end-of-life care and discuss it with their loved ones and health professionals.

ISLHD Director Palliative Care Service, Dr Greg Barclay said palliative care isn’t just about end of life, it’s also about care provided to those with a life-limiting illness.

Life-limiting illnesses are those which doctors recognise can often be controlled or slowed down, but will limit a person’s life. These can range from metastatic cancer, to kidney, heart or lung disease. They can’t be cured, but managing the symptoms can add quality of life back to the person living with the disease.

Dr Barclay said an important focus of palliative care is to improve the quality of life for people with a life-limiting illness.

“To achieve this, Palliative Care Services are involved earlier in the disease process, to help manage a range of symptoms, often patients are admitted into a palliative care ward, or seen at home, to get specific symptoms sorted, and then go on to live well at home for months or even years,” he said.

“Our Palliative Care Service aims to follow and support patients and family members on their journey and be involved when we are needed throughout the course of their illness, not just at the end,” Dr Barclay said.

ISLHD’s Palliative Care Service includes a team of doctors, nurses, allied health staff, social workers and volunteers, who work in collaboration with GPs and other specialists and provide services both in hospital and at home.

The NSW Government recently provided funding for ISLHD to enhance its Specialist Palliative Care Service through workforce enhancements: an additional palliative care staff specialist, two additional palliative care nurses and 23 placements for on-the-job training.

The funding is part of the NSW Government’s biggest ever palliative care investment of \$100 million over four years, including \$17.4 million in 2017/18 – on top of the approximately \$210 million spent on these services each year.

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

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Palliative Care Week reminds the community to take the time to talk to loved ones about what would matter most to them if their time together was likely to be limited.

“It’s never too early to think and talk about what you want. Talking about what matters most to you can help family members, as well as doctors providing your care, to really help you live the way you want right to the end,” he said.

Further resources are available at <http://dyingtotalk.org.au/discussion-starter-online/>