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Professor Andrea Driscoll MACN

Growing the justice health nursing workforce

Student placements in custodial health across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

Rhian Czech FCHSM, CHE, BN

The underground hospital

Mt Isa's World War II backup plan

Michelle Reardon MACN and Dr Kristin Edwards FACN

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Cover
Kath Stein GAICD FACN, ACN President, and Professor Andrea Driscoll MACN

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WELCOME

02 President's welcome

03 CEO welcome

COMMUNITY AND NETWORKING

04 ACN Connect heads to Tasmania

04 Budget breakfast

05 International Nurses Dayh

06 ICN Updates

06 Coming up in your calendar

COLUMNISTS

08 Green Cities: How Green Infrastructure Helps Heal the Planet

08 Historically Speaking: Remembering Sister Frances Hines

COVER STORY

10 The scope to innovate: Meet the 2026 Nursing Trailblazer

FEATURES

12 **Professional development:** From recognition to expansionr

14 **Professional development:** Palliative care needs for end-of-life patients with trauma

16 **Institute of Leadership:** Commitment, collaboration and dedication

20 **Institute of Leadership:** Internationally Trained nurses

22 **Engagement in focus:** Supporting, empowering and advancing Global Nurses

24 **Editorial feature:** Growing the justice health nursing workforce

26 **Editorial feature:** Endless possibilities

28 **Editorial feature:** Navigating premature ageing

31 **Editorial feature:** Digital detox and screen-time management

32 **Editorial feature:** Relationship-centred care

34 **Editorial feature:** Angels need not apply

36 **Policy and advocay:** Nurses and Midwives in the House

38 **Education:** Progressing your career

40 **Nursing history:** The Underground Hospital

42 **Archives:** Down the rabbit hole

44 **Editorial feature/book review:** So why aren't we talking about money?

46 **Health and welbeing**: Staying healthy

48 **ACN Foundation:** Update on activities

52 **Novel thoughts:** Reviews of a good read

54 **ACN Foundation:** Broaden your horizons – join a nursing study tour

55 **In memorium:** Dr Jocalyn Lawler

56 **Contributors:** Thank you to all our contributors

COMMITMENT, COLLABORATION AND DEDICATION

Supporting nurses to realise their potential as nurse researchers

As the Emerging Research Leader Program enters its fourth year, its impact continues to grow.

As the nursing profession continues to evolve, its future depends on combining excellence in clinical practice with research that advances patient care. Recognising this, the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) Institute of Leadership developed the Emerging Research Leader Program (ERLP), an initiative designed to support nurses at the beginning of their research careers.

In 2026, the program marked its third successful year, continuing its mission to empower nurses with the knowledge, skills, confidence, and support required to undertake meaningful research and contribute to evidence-based health care.

Nurses are uniquely positioned to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement within healthcare systems. Yet despite their vital role, nurses remain underrepresented in the research landscape. The ERLP aims to bridge this gap by cultivating a new generation of nurse researchers who can lead innovation, strengthen nursing knowledge, and improve health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Over a nine-month period, participants build foundational research capabilities through expert-led workshops, online learning, and one-on-one mentorship. A defining feature of the program is the pairing of each Scholar with an experienced ACN Research Mentor who provides guidance, encouragement, and practical advice throughout the research journey.

Since its inception, the program has supported 20 emerging research leaders. With the support of their mentors, Scholars have completed literature reviews, developed research protocols, undertaken small-scale research projects, and produced a range of scholarly outputs. These have included abstracts, conference presentations, research plans, protocols, and manuscripts, several of which are now progressing towards publication in peer-reviewed journals and presentation at national and international conferences.

The achievements celebrated at the conclusion of each program reflect the commitment, collaboration, and dedication of both Scholars and Mentors. Together, they are helping to build a stronger research culture within the nursing profession.

CELEBRATING EMERGING NURSE RESEARCHERS

In August, the Institute of Leadership hosted a webinar showcasing the work of several 2025 Emerging Research Leaders and highlighting the impact of nurse-led research across diverse areas of practice.

Among the projects presented were:

- Amy Granger MACN: Exploring the experiences of medical-surgical nurses caring for hospitalised patients with chronic pain at Royal North Shore Hospital.
- Jennifer (Marie) Stewart MACN: The GENTLE Approach to Pain Management.
- Kate Hurley MACN: Undergraduate student nurse experiences of clinical placement in rural and remote settings: A scoping review.
- Keirran Hiscock MACN: Nursing roles and responsibilities in outpatient bronchiectasis care: A scoping review.
- Kate Mace MACN: A scoping review of nursing students' perceptions of the impact of moulage in wound assessment education: Effects on learning and knowledge retention.
- Dianna Gebhardt MACN: Unlocking the healing powers: Compression therapy for infected wounds.

These projects demonstrate the breadth of nursing research and its potential to influence practice, education, patient outcomes, and healthcare delivery.

THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP

A key feature of the ERLP is its dedicated network of mentors, who support nurse researchers by sharing their expertise, experience, and encouragement. For many, mentoring is an opportunity to give back to the profession while helping emerging researchers build confidence and achieve their potential.

Several ERLP mentors share what inspires them to mentor and why investing in the next generation of nurse researchers matters.

Professor Kathleen Tori FACN

Professor Kathleen Tori, Dean of Nursing in the Faculty of Science and Health, CSU, described her motivation for mentoring as a commitment to advancing nursing research and supporting future nurse scholars.

"Throughout my career, I have benefited from the guidance of generous mentors who challenged, encouraged, and inspired me," she said. "Participating in this program provides an opportunity to give back to the profession by sharing knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned."

Professor Tori highlighted that mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship, offering opportunities to learn from emerging researchers while witnessing their professional growth.

"It is an opportunity to shape the future of nursing research by investing in talented nurses who will become the profession's next generation of research leaders."

Kai Ibrahim Ergo MACN

For Kai Ibrahim Ergo, encouraging more nurses to embrace research is a key motivation for mentoring.

"Nurses bring valuable clinical knowledge and unique perspectives to healthcare challenges, yet many may feel uncertain or intimidated about beginning their research journey," he said.

He described one of the greatest rewards of mentoring as seeing researchers overcome challenges, develop confidence, and recognise the value of their work.

"Research is achievable, meaningful and capable of making a genuine contribution to the profession."

Associate Professor Rebekkah Middleton MACN

Associate Professor Rebekkah Middleton views mentorship as an investment in the future of nursing scholarship.

"The Emerging Research Leader Program seeks to enhance research skills and encourage nurses to contribute to the profession's growing body of knowledge," she said.

She reflected that mentoring has not only allowed her to support others, but has also strengthened her own appreciation of research integrity, relevance, and collaboration.

Dr Sujatha Shanmugasundaram FACN

University of Canberra Lecturer Dr Sujatha Shanmugasundaram has been mentoring within the ERLP for more than three years.

For Dr Shanmugasundaram, mentoring is about helping nurses develop the confidence to see themselves as researchers and future leaders.

"While milestones such as publications, grant applications, conference presentations, and career progression are important, I believe the greatest impact of mentoring is empowering individuals to recognise their potential and pursue ambitious goals with confidence," she said.

She emphasised the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment where scholars can share challenges, explore ideas, and develop professionally.

Dr Sheeja Perumbil Pathrose MACN

Dr Sheeja Perumbil Pathrose, Senior Lecturer and Director of the JBI Western Sydney Centre at Western Sydney University, believes the program provides essential support for clinicians taking their first steps into research.

"The transition into research can be daunting for clinicians, particularly those without a traditional academic pathway," she said. "This program offers structured and practical guidance that enables clinicians to translate frontline knowledge into meaningful research contributions."

Among her proudest mentoring achievements was supporting Clinical Nurse Consultant Regina Cai, whose qualitative systematic review examining barriers to accessing physical healthcare for people with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders is currently under review for publication. Ms Cai was also awarded the First Time Presenter Award at the 49th International Mental Health Nursing Conference in 2025.

Associate Professor Tracey Ahern MACN

Since joining the program in 2024, Associate Professor Tracey Ahern has mentored Emerging Research Leaders through project development and completion.

She describes mentoring as an opportunity to inspire and learn alongside researchers while strengthening research capability across the profession.

"My proudest moments have come from creating a supportive space where scholars feel comfortable sharing ideas, challenges, and aspirations," she said. "It's incredibly rewarding to watch them build confidence and recognise their potential as future researchers."

Dr. Rona Pillay FACN

Dr. Rona Pillay, Lecturer at School of Nursing and Midwifery, Western Sydney University reflects on her motivation to mentor, which stems from a deep belief that clinical expertise and research capability are not separate worlds. Nurses at the bedside hold invaluable insights that deserve to inform the literature, policy, and practice.

The personal benefit she receives is profound.

"Every conversation with my mentee sharpens my own thinking, reminds me why research matters, and deepens my commitment to nursing as a scholarly profession. Mentoring is not a one-way relationship; I grow alongside the people I support. If I were to describe this program in one sentence: "The ACN Emerging Research Leader Program transforms clinical passion into research confidence—one nurse at a time."

Her proudest contribution has been supporting her current mentee as she developed her first research project exploring nurses' experiences of caring for patients with chronic pain. Watching her mentee present her work at the Australian Pain Society Annual Scientific Meeting in Adelaide earlier this year, followed by a poster presentation at the ACN National Nurses Forum in August, has been incredibly rewarding. The project has progressed to a manuscript in preparation and inspired aspirations toward a PhD.

If I were to describe this program in one sentence:

"The ACN Emerging Research Leader Program transforms clinical passion into research confidence—one nurse at a time."

"I am equally proud of previous mentees who have presented at international conferences, led quality improvement projects, and influenced clinical practice to improve patient care. Through mentoring, I aim to build research capability within the nursing workforce, empowering clinicians to generate evidence that advances the profession and improves outcomes for patients."

Ravani Duggan MACN

Ravani Duggan, Professor at the Curtin School of Nursing was delighted when the Emerging Research Leader Program was introduced, as she feels a strong professional responsibility to contribute to the program and support emerging nurse researchers as throughout her career she benefited from the generosity, guidance and expertise of many outstanding nurse researchers and clinicians

Professor Duggan reflects how being a Mentor is a deeply rewarding shared learning experience and is a meaningful opportunity to support nurses to move from research consumers to confident research producers who can lead evidence-based improvements in practice:

"While I have contributed research and academic expertise, my mentees have brought rich clinical knowledge and practice-based insight that has expanded my own thinking. The role has strengthened my professional networks and given me great satisfaction in seeing emerging nurse researchers develop their skills, confidence and leadership. Knowing I have played even a small part in their growth is personally and professionally rewarding."

"The Emerging Research Leader Program is a meaningful opportunity to support nurses to move from research consumers to confident research producers who can lead evidence-based improvements in practice.

"My proudest contribution has been supporting two excellent nursing clinicians in building confidence in the research space and developing the skills to undertake independent nurse-led research."

TESTIMONIALS

Completing the program significantly increased both my confidence and competence in research, giving me the skills and self-belief to pursue opportunities I had previously thought were beyond my reach. One of my lifelong goals has been to complete a PhD, and enrolling in the program gave me the confidence to take that step. Beginning my PhD is one of my proudest professional achievements and a result of the growth I experienced through the program.

- Kate Hurley MACN

The ELRP provides information, funding, networking and mentoring support to Nurses interested in enhancing their knowledge and skills in Research. I would recommend the program to all Nurses wishing to explore new career horizons, address gaps in clinical practice and contribute to quality, evidence-based health care.

- Jennifer "Marie" Stewart MACN

REFLECTIONS OF THE ERLP COURSE CREATOR

The Institute of Leadership gratefully acknowledges Adjunct Professor Michael Roche, course creator of the ERLP, whose significant contribution, insight and commitment have been instrumental in building the strong foundation on which the program continues to thrive today.

Adjunct Professor Michael Roche
PhD, MHSc, BHSc, DipAppSc, MH Cert, RN, FACN

Over the past three or so years, I have been fortunate to be part of the Emerging Research Leader program by developing self-directed learning modules and conducting the online workshops. Our intent in developing the program was to provide a structured and mentored research experience for nurses who wanted to build their skills in the creation and application of robust evidence for practice, with the potential to bring about positive change in their organisation or clinical field. Throughout, I have been impressed with the focus of the projects the scholars have undertaken, all of which have significant potential for impact on health outcomes. Their projects, too many to list here, have all been targeted at improving the delivery of high-quality, safe, effective, and efficient health care, whether that be at the individual or organisational level. Their research builds on the long history of nursing research and ensures that rigorous enquiry is at the foundation of our profession. The scholars' enormous enthusiasm for their topics is infectious, as I am sure anyone who has witnessed their presentations at the National Nursing Forum or elsewhere, or who has read their publications, will attest. This augurs well for the future of the scholars and for nursing research. I look forward to seeing the past, current, and future Emerging Research Leaders become Established Research Leaders and apply nursing research evidence to improve outcomes for the people and families for whom we care, for the organisations in which we work, and for the nursing profession.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the ERLP enters its fourth year, its impact continues to grow. Each Scholar who completes the program contributes not only to their own professional development but also to the advancement of nursing knowledge and practice across Australia.

The program is opening doors, inspiring nurses to pursue research-focused careers, and strengthening the profession's capacity to lead evidence-based change.

The success of the ERLP is made possible by the generosity and commitment of its mentors, whose expertise, encouragement, and guidance help emerging researchers transform ideas into meaningful research. Their contributions are shaping the next generation of nurse researchers and ensuring a strong future for nurse-led research in Australia.

RESEARCH MENTOR HONOUR ROLL:

ERLP 2026 Mentors:

Kai Ibrahim Ergo MACN
Kathleen Tori FACN
Kristin Edwards FACN
Rebecca Jedwab FACN
Sheeja Perumbil Pathrose MACN
Nicole Gavin MACN
Sujatha Shanmugasundaram FACN
Tracey Ahern MACN
Samuel Lapkin MACN

ERLP 2025 Mentors:

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Sally Lima MACN
Ravani Duggan MACN
Sheeja Perumbil Pathrose MACN
Rona Pillay FACN
Julie Flynn MACN
Rebekkah Middleton MACN
Kai Ibrahim Ergo MACN
Rebecca Jedwab FACN
Sujatha Shanmugasundaram FACN
Kathleen Tori FACN

ERLP 2024 Mentors:

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Liz Halcomb FACN
Sally Lima MACN
Nicole Gavin MACN
Rona Pillay FACN
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SOPHIE KERR AZEVEDO
ACN Coordinator,
Institute of Leadership

SUPPORTING, EMPOWERING AND ADVANCING GLOBAL NURSES

An ACN and Anmac Collaboration

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (Anmac) have partnered on a significant research initiative to improve career outcomes and workforce experiences for Australia's internationally qualified and overseas-born nurses, collectively referred to as Global Nurses.

With approximately 40 per cent of Australia's nursing workforce either internationally qualified or born overseas, Global Nurses have a vital role in supporting the delivery of healthcare services across the country. Despite their significant contribution to the profession and the communities they serve, evidence suggests they remain underrepresented in leadership and management positions and face unique challenges throughout their migration journey.

Recognising both the importance of this workforce and the need for greater understanding of their experiences, ACN and Anmac are combining their expertise and resources to undertake research that will generate practical insights for employers, policymakers and the nursing profession. The collaboration seeks to strengthen workforce participation, improve retention outcomes and support the long-term career progression of Global Nurses in Australia.

At the centre of the initiative is a research project involving a cohort of internationally recruited nurses employed at a regional Australian hospital. The project has been designed to explore the experiences of Global Nurses from recruitment through to workplace integration and longer-term employment. By examining the factors contributing to successful settlement and professional engagement, the study aims to identify approaches that can be replicated across the health and aged care sectors.

The research will investigate various stages of the migration and employment pathway, including recruitment processes, relocation and settlement experiences, workplace induction and orientation, professional integration, career development opportunities and workplace culture. Through a deeper understanding of these experiences, the project aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve recruitment and retention strategies and support employers in designing effective onboarding practices.

Importantly, the study also seeks to contribute to broader cultural and organisational change. By amplifying the voices and lived experiences of Global Nurses, the project aims to challenge existing perceptions and support more inclusive and culturally responsive workplaces across healthcare settings. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how internationally qualified healthcare workers are perceived, welcomed, and supported, and identify opportunities to strengthen belonging, professional recognition and career advancement.

The project will be conducted over a 12-month period and will use qualitative research methods to capture rich and detailed participant experiences. ACN members are the lead researchers on the project and will be facilitating face-to-face focus groups with nurses from the participating cohort. These discussions will provide an opportunity for participants to share their personal and professional experiences, helping researchers gain a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping successful workforce integration and retention.

Ethics approval for the study has been granted, ensuring the research is conducted

Global Nurses have a vital role in supporting the delivery of healthcare services across the country.

in accordance with established ethical standards and best-practice principles. Participant recruitment is currently underway.

Retention rates for this cohort are currently very high, so it is important to understand the factors contributing to such a successful outcome. Researchers are particularly interested in exploring the recruitment, onboarding and integration approaches adopted by the employer and experienced by the cohort. Understanding what has driven these high retention rates could inform future workforce strategies and provide practical lessons for employers facing persistent workforce shortages, particularly in regional and rural areas. Findings may also guide future phases of research, including exploration of rural and remote region experiences, metropolitan city experiences, employer practices, workplace culture and the broader conditions that enable Global Nurses to thrive in Australia.

The focus on retention is especially relevant given emerging evidence regarding the experiences of internationally qualified health professionals following migration. Recent research undertaken by Anmac through the first wave of a longitudinal survey with its skilled migration applicants indicates thatsuccessful migration outcomes often begin to falter between 12 and 24 months after arrival and employment. While initial recruitment and settlement may be successful, factors such as workplace integration, social connectedness, professional development opportunities and organisational support can influence whether individuals choose to remain in their roles and communities over the longer term.

Anmac brings significant expertise and a rich evidence base to the partnership. As the Australian Government's designated skills assessing authority for internationally qualified nurses, midwives and direct care workers, Anmac is responsible for assessing applicants' qualifications and professional experience to determine their suitability for migration under various skills pathways. The organisation (formerly the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council) has been carrying out this function since 1994 and holds extensive data on the migration pathways of nurses and midwives coming to Australia.

The ACN Global Nurse Faculty also has an important role in supporting the project. The faculty comprises ACN members who bring both lived experience and professional expertise to the research. Many members have navigated the challenges and opportunities of migration and professional integration, giving them a unique perspective on the issues being explored. As part of its contribution, the faculty is undertaking a comprehensive literature review to support the research and identify existing evidence on the experiences of Global Nurses in Australia and internationally. The review will help contextualise the study findings, identify gaps in current knowledge and strengthen the evidence base for future policy and practice recommendations.

Through this collaboration, ACN and Anmac are demonstrating a shared commitment to ensuring Global Nurses are recognised, supported and empowered to reach their full professional potential. By understanding the factors contributing to successful recruitment, integration and retention, the project aims to support a more sustainable nursing workforce while promoting greater equity, inclusion and career progression for global nurses in Australia.

KATH BAIRD MACN
Anmac Director,
Skilled Migration Services

FRANCES RICE MACN
ACN Chief Nursing Officer

RELATIONSHIP-CENTRED CARE

Describing the development of a new clinical model of care in response to aged care changes in Australia

INTRODUCTION

Many clinicians are familiar with the rapid and substantial aged care reforms over recent years (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety2019), driven largely by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The subsequent Aged Care Act (2024), and strengthened Aged Care Standards (2025) (https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-standards), importantly established a 'rights-based' framework; emphasises the older person's control over their care; and mandates service performance measurement and benchmarking (Smith, Travers, Roberts et al 2024).

STARTING CHANGE

Over an 18-month period, a large aged care provider (responsible for 41 residential care homes, among other activities), supported by a university research partnership, has been changing its traditional Model of Care (MoC) to align with the Standards. Current dominant MoCs have not kept pace with ageing populations or the growing complexity of residents' needs (Hullick, Conway, Higgins et al 2016). And the need for advanced clinical skills in residential care (RC), particularly end-of-life (EoL) care is increasingly recognised as a global concern (Eagar, Westera, Snoek et al, 2019).

Using co-design processes, the aim is to improve residents' quality of life (QoL), support them to live with meaning and purpose; de-institutionalise services and care delivery; and shift from task-based to relationship-based care. The principle of co-design is that people affected by an issue have the right to participate in designing responses, through genuine partnerships.

Relationship-centred care has been utilised in policy and research over many years, emphasising an holistic MoC as well as valuing individual personhood – their life story; their needs, wishes and preferences; their family and other relationships; and their social environment (Casey, Carroll, Coghlan et al 2024).

University ethics approval was received for this work.

PROCESS

With the external legislative impetus to support extensive change, the process commenced with an overarching awareness of the need to change clinical work practices to assist older people to live 'normally', despite living in institutional care. The explicit goal was to work *with* people, not doing to or for them, symbolizing organisational respect and the individual's right for control over their own life. Alongside the MoC development, a deep dive into existing EoL care and pain management was completed.

To develop a new MoC, five "pioneer" homes were identified based on differing sizes, settings, and resident profiles. Across these homes, fifteen facilitated workshops were conducted, involving many participants – residents, relatives, clinical employees, managers, and organisational representatives. The overall MoC emerged as the most pressing issue to improve residents' everyday outcomes and overall QoL.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

To underpin changes, a complete review of the systems was undertaken: IT infrastructure, human resourcing, clinical management, accounts, and included reporting obligations and measures to demonstrate improvements.

Each home identified core areas of focus for the MoC – relaxed awakening; dining; consistent assignment; 'what matters' to individuals; and medication management – which were then tailored to reflect the characteristics of each home's residents.

Both residents and care employees questioned why residents needed to be woken at a common time (historically in place to provide hygiene care in a short timeframe). It was agreed to trial 'relaxed awakening', where individuals choose when to wake and when to have breakfast, provided in buffet style.

Other mealtimes were also reviewed, especially the evening meal, which now has extended times, enabling residents to choose their own mealtimes, and includes a menu for choice.

A focus on rostering provides consistent assignment, so clinical employees may develop a deeper understanding of each individual's needs and preferences. A proposal to replace 'personal carer' with 'care companion' aims to reflect a more equal, relationship-focused approach.

In line with consistent staffing, the organisation is exploring a household MoC, where smaller resident groups live together in a home-like environment, with dedicated clinical employees, and residents may participate in familiar daily activities.

As residents increasingly articulate what matters to them, new initiatives have been introduced to support wellbeing, alleviate loneliness and promote physical activity. Walking groups, aqua aerobics (where appropriate), and other exercise programs have been established to help residents stay active and connected.

Early work has begun on a revised medication model where residents' medications are stored in their rooms. Supported by new software, this approach aims to enhance privacy and dignity, shift practice from rushed 'medication rounds', and reduce the risk of medication errors.

The deep dive into palliative care and EoL care revealed significant gaps, prompting the appointment of a Nurse Practitioner with a specialisation in palliative care, to facilitate, educate, and support clinical employees across all homes. A major priority is the implementation of a consistent, evidence-based palliative and EoL care model grounded in national standards and integrated into both the MoC and the organisation's strategic goals, particularly its commitment to promoting mental and spiritual wellbeing at the end of their life.

Image used with permission from Catholic Healthcare Ltd

The deep dive into pain management identified important areas for improvement. Although the annual mandatory pain management education exceeded benchmark levels, a third of residents lacked a formal diagnosis for chronic or acute pain. Anticipatory EoL medications were not consistently charted and the use of other 'as required' medications were often inappropriate or inconsistent.

DISCUSSION

Documenting organisational changes highlights that a new MoC represents a profound organisational shift, with every aspect of service delivery affected, especially for clinicians. Meaningful organisational commitment from the Board to the bedside has therefore been essential to the project's success.

Feedback through the legislatively required Consumer Advisory Body, the organisation's consumer-engagement mechanism, has been especially influential. Participation continues to increase, with reflections on and suggestions about care quality, consistently highlighting employees' respectful, holistic approach to care. Of note is a reduction in behaviours of concern among residents and increased satisfaction with food across all homes. The shift toward encouraging activity has been positively received, and participation in social activities has increased.

Qualitative feedback from clinical employees indicates a more detailed approach to individualised care; improvements in resident behaviour, social connection, and health outcomes, including weight gain and fewer unwitnessed falls. The work, especially hygiene care, is spread across the day, reducing pressure on employees, and fewer complaints have been noted.

Strengthening clinical employees' understanding of pain assessment tools, EoL care, dementia-related pain behaviours, and care planning is critical to supporting holistic care (Aasmul, Sandgathe Husebo et al 2016). Employees report reduced distress and burnout when residents' pain is more effectively assessed and managed (Aasmul, Sandgathe Husebo et al 2016).

Education is a central enabler of change (Spacey, Scammell, Board et al 2019). Education of care-focused employees requires careful planning, to ensure learning is meaningful not burdensome; but, the optimal amount and format remain contested (Spacey, Scammell, Board et al 2019). Nevertheless, equipping clinical employees to feel confident in increasingly complex roles is essential to the success of the MoC.

CONCLUSION

Implementing a project of this magnitude has required strong leadership, Board commitment and substantial engagement from all employees. The MoC pilot initiatives will be progressively implemented and formally evaluated over the next few years, supporting the transition from task-based to relationship-centred care. Co-design has fostered honest dialogue, and equal partnerships enabling a notable cultural shift. Residents, often assumed to have limited expectations of their care, are now routinely asked what matters to them, a core element of the emerging MoC.

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