

Centre for Ageing & Pastoral Studies, Canberra: Response to the Productivity Commission's draft paper on *Caring for Older Australians*

The Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS) is a not-for-profit centre for multi-disciplinary research, education and policy development in pastoral studies, ageing and related ethical issues. CAPS is a part of St Mark's National Theological Centre and operates within the Charles Sturt University School of Theology. CAPS seeks to:

- Affirm the integrity and dignity of human beings across the life span;
- Explore the spiritual dimension of ageing and meaning of life issues in the context of an ageing society;
- Examine ethical issues related to ageing;
- Assist people to learn to live in an ageing society;
- Reduce barriers that may exist between the different age groups of society;
- Develop policies related to ageing; and
- Disseminate the findings of its research to all with a professional interest in them and to older people.

CAPS works with the aged care industry, government and other agencies to achieve these ends.

CAPS' response

CAPS generally supports the proposals in the Productivity Commission's draft report. In particular, CAPS is pleased to see the suggestions to establish a gateway for transition to aged care services, an independent regulatory commission to be responsible for quality accreditation, addressing complaints and recommending fees, the proposed greater flexibility in the range of care and support services, and the greater emphasis on restorative care and rehabilitation.

The initial CAPS' submission, however, drew the Productivity Commission's attention to the key place that cultural and spiritual matters should occupy in the funding and delivery of quality residential and community care in Australia. The submission pointed out that *The Aged Care Act 1997*, and the supporting Aged Care Standards and Accreditation requirements, clearly provide for expected outcomes with respect to the cultural and spiritual life of the recipients of aged care services.

CAPS requests the Commission to give proper recognition in its final report and recommendations to the important connection between delivering quality aged care and the cultural and spiritual dimensions of people's lives regardless of their age, health and accommodation. The draft report (page xxv) clearly highlights that the overriding public policy objective in aged care should be the focus for older people on their physical and emotional needs, connections to others, ability to exert influence over their environment, and their safety from harm.

CAPS notes that some submissions to the Productivity Commission raised issues around spirituality and that the draft report does make passing reference to the matter in citing these contributions. CAPS believes, however, that issues related to spirituality and cultural diversity are an important emerging discourse in the delivery of aged care and other health and caring services in multi-ethnic plural societies, including Australia, which need to be addressed. A key consideration is that enlightened and well managed communication and understanding of these issues will deliver better outcomes for older people, their families, friends, carers and providers. Attending to cultural and spiritual needs translates to good social and economic results. The legislative framework of the Aged Care Act 1997 also envisages more than token recognition of these needs.

The Evidence Base

The relationship between spirituality and health has been researched widely (Moberg 2008). Moberg (2008 p 107), writing about the Spiritual Well Being Scale developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982), says the findings '*demonstrate that spiritual wellness is positively correlated with many measures of physical and mental health, life satisfaction, hope, successful coping with crises, marital satisfaction, peace and comfort during terminal illness, and other indicators of social and psychological well-being*'. The significance of spirituality for those with chronic illnesses, particularly mental ill health, is investigated by Nichols and Hunt (2011). The role of spirituality is to assist people to explore the meaning and purpose for life and to assist with connecting to meaningful relationships and pursuits. Individuals are better able to face the challenges of every day life and improve their quality of life when they understand how to manage themselves.

Moberg, D. (2008). Spirituality and Aging: Research and Implications. In Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging, Vol. 20 (1-2) pp. 95 - 134.

Nichols, L. M. & Hunt, B. (2011). The significance of spirituality for individuals with chronic illness: Implications for mental health counseling. In Journal of Mental Health Counseling. Vol. 33 (1) pp. 51-66.

The spiritual dimension

While the definitions of 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' are very much contested, both in religious and secular senses, they can be seen as a personal search for meaning, regardless of religious affiliation or no affiliation. Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it can be argued that religion is only one component or stream of spirituality.

Spirituality is a creative, dynamic and human factor which pastoral workers, aged care workers and aged care nurses need to grapple with and understand in the lives of their culturally-diverse clients, including importantly those enduring confusion and dementia.

Discerning meaning for later life is an important task in the experience of all humans. Strategies are needed for implementing insights gained from discernment, both by the individual and by the culture. This is a spiritual activity. This involves discernment of meaning and developing strategies for effective ageing. For many, this comes to expression through a religious faith and practice as the means of developing personal or shared strategies for well-being in later life. The different religious traditions offer complementary and unique ways of nurturing spiritual growth in ageing.

CAPS emerges out of the Christian tradition and recognizes the importance of this diversity. As a result CAPS is concerned with the education, and fostering of this spiritual activity by providing information to inform the working out of its consequences for the person and society. CAPS is engaged in an evidence based approach to inform the recognition and valuing of the quality of life aspirations of all older people.

There is a need to learn more about the ageing human being, and how we may maximize well-being in ageing. In an age that has promoted science and technology many of the spiritual strategies for living well have been lost. As well as quality care, older people need strategies for continued spiritual growth and enrichment.

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