

Introducing Advanced Care Planning

Case study provided by Denise Femino, Uniting East Burwood

Introduction

When Denise Femino, Manager, Uniting East Burwood social support group received a booklet about Advanced Care Planning it sat on her desk for a few weeks as she pondered the books content and thought about its relevance within the context of the social support group that she supported. Denise recognised the value of the information but admits to being somewhat 'nervous' about broaching the subject with carers.

Getting the conversation started

Armed with some advice and resources from the internet and a Palliative Care Consortium, Denise initially introduced the idea with the Centre's carers group. Denise recognised that people often think of Advanced Care Planning as 'planning death' and was keen to foster the idea that Advanced Care Planning is more about ensuring the things that are important to you into the future are known and understood.

"I shared a 'light-hearted' story about my love for Cliff Richard and my desire to have one of his songs played at my funeral. Unfortunately, my children don't share that same appreciation for Cliff and I'm determined to ensure that my wishes are known and clear".

This light-hearted introduction was how Denise presented the idea of Advanced Care Planning with her regular carers meeting and it certainly hit the mark. Denise says the group immediately relaxed and spent lots of time talking about the things that were important to them, and how they wanted certain aspects of their lives considered as part of their future care needs. This 'soft entry' to the Advanced Care Planning discussion enabled Denise to create a comfortable and safe environment for discussion.

It also highlighted to Denise that carers' didn't actually know the expressed wishes of the people they cared for.

Building the momentum

Encouraged by the carers' interest, Denise organised a session with the carers group to explore Advanced Care Planning in more detail. The session coincided with the national Dying to Know Day on 8 August. The session promoted an opportunity to have a conversation over a cup of tea and attracted more attendance than usual.

As part of the session, Denise again provided some initial information about Advanced Care Planning and brought in copies of a Will, Power of Attorney's and other information for participants to take away and read more thoroughly later.

During the session, the carers put together their own booklet about their values, preferences and wishes into the future. While Denise gave some guidelines, the intent was to inject some fun into an often-serious subject. People did their own thing resulting in some wonderfully colourful and crafty booklets while others produced more simplistic, straightforward documents.

Denise encouraged carers to complete the booklets in private, (for their own purposes) and was pleased to hear that eight of the ten carers actually did just that!

'It's not something I wanted to talk about, but it's so great we have!'
(Uniting Burwood East client)

As a direct outcome of this session one carer (with a dual caring role for a sister and a parent) returned to the program the following Friday to report she had started the process of organising Power of Attorney and Wills.

Given the success of the carers group discussion, Denise signed up to run an event as part of the National Advanced Care Planning week, held yearly in April). This public event hosted by the Uniting East Burwood Positive Living Group involved a morning tea, and light luncheon with information, speakers and resources.

Again, somewhat unsure about how the event would unfold, particularly as members of the public were attending along with program regulars, Denise made sure she included some fun strategies to engage people with such a serious subject. This included speakers, games and resources (such as cue cards) available via the website to get the conversation started.



Denise says the use of tools made it easier to broach the subject and encourage carers to think about ensuring that all of the wishes of their loved ones were being addressed adequately.

As part of the event, Denise acknowledged the value of providing information for people to take away. On this occasion the 'Goody bags' included

- Advanced Care Planning Australia <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/>
- Department of Health & Human Services (Victoria) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/advance-care-planning>
- Dying to Know Day <https://www.dyingtoknowday.org/>

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a collection of fun, interesting items but also some important information that consolidated the key messages of the day around Advanced Care Planning.

'Be respectful, particularly when talking with people from different cultures who may have different traditions, understanding or beliefs about the subject'
(Denise Femino, Manager, Uniting Burwood East)

Where to from here

Reflecting on her experience, and those of the centre's carers and participants, Denise suggests that it's no great surprise that people were happy to talk about themselves. 'Reminiscing' is a technique often used in a social support setting to engage people; and can be used to identify and understand what's important to people. - key elements essential to introducing people to Advanced Care Planning.

The Centre has tentatively started to introduce the idea of advanced care planning as part of the service review discussion with client and/or carer. Where appropriate, this may involve some gentle questioning or a discussion to gauge their interest or engagement with advanced care planning.

Uniting East Burwood continues to support activities associated with Advanced Care Planning Week (April) and 'Dying to Know Day' on the 8 August each year.