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Wednesday 4 September 2018

Dementia Awareness Month a good time to think about the future

Widespread education will be imperative in addressing the needs of the estimated 540,000 Australians who are expected to be living with dementia by 2025, according to researchers at the University of Tasmania.

Dementia is the second leading cause of death of Australians, contributing to 5.4% of all deaths in males and 10.6% of all deaths in females each year.

Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre Director Professor James Vickers said September - Dementia Awareness Month - was a good time to look at becoming more informed about dementia, which already has had a dramatic impact on many Australians, and statistically, will affect the lives of a great number of those we know and love in the future.

"Currently, Dementia Australia has estimated that, on average, 250 people in Australia are joining the population with dementia each day," Professor Vickers said.

"The number of new cases of dementia will increase to 318 people per day by 2025 and more than 650 people by 2056."

He said the growing demand for information about dementia had been highlighted through the uptake of the Wicking Centre's Understanding Dementia and Preventing Dementia Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

The free online courses were recently rated by independent global MOOC evaluating body, Class Central, as the top two health and medical MOOCs globally.

"Caring for a loved one with dementia, or being diagnosed with dementia, can fill people with worry and anxiety as to what may lay ahead," Professor Vickers said.

"Learning more about the disease can assist people in what can feel like an overwhelming situation and provide a better quality of life to those with dementia.

"And learning about the risk factors for dementia can help people reduce their risk and potentially reduce the growing numbers of people affected by dementia."

Since 2013, more than 200,000 people from more than 185 countries have enrolled in the Wicking Centre's free dementia MOOCs, with an average of 20,000 people currently completing each course.

Professor Vickers said the MOOCs were aimed at everyone – from those living with dementia and their families and friends, and anyone interested in reducing their dementia risk, to aged care industry workers and health professionals.

"The response to the MOOCs to date is testament to the need for education and support in our community," he said.

"The aged care sector is under extreme pressure in terms of access to the right skills to provide care for people living with dementia – and this pressure will grow as our workforce and economy continues to feel the pressure of the dramatic increase in dementia diagnosis."

Enrolments are currently open for the next Preventing Dementia MOOC. For more information on the Wicking Centre's MOOCs visit <http://www.utas.edu.au/wicking>

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