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Thursday, 11 April 2019

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## Research shows dementia education makes a difference

The importance of education to support people living with dementia, their families, nurses and aged care workers has been highlighted in the latest University of Tasmania research.

Published today in the Nature Partner Journal [Science of Learning](#), the research measured the effectiveness of the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre's Understanding Dementia Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on dementia understanding.

The Understanding Dementia MOOC was introduced by the Wicking Centre in 2013 and has had more than 190,000 enrolments internationally.

The study showed that regardless of previous education and prior experience of dementia, all participants had greatly increased their knowledge of dementia in areas relevant to the provision of high-quality dementia care.

The study was based on the use of the Wicking Centre's recently developed dementia knowledge tool, the Dementia Knowledge Assessment Scale (DKAS) and involved around 5,000 MOOC participants.

Wicking Centre researcher Claire Eccleston said the study, which is one of the few attempts to measure MOOC learning outcomes, was a response to research which showed significant deficits in the knowledge of important aspects of dementia in family carers, aged care support workers, nurses and other health professionals.

"This deficit clearly has an effect on how we approach and configure care for people with dementia at different stages of progression of the condition," Dr Eccleston said.

"This research shows that MOOC approaches may provide accessible opportunities to obtain this knowledge, potentially at the scale necessary to make a systemic difference to how we consider and support people with dementia."

Professor Fran McInerney from the Wicking Dementia Centre said the benefits of the course extend beyond knowledge gains to the promotion of healthy and meaningful living by people with dementia.

“The Understanding Dementia MOOC promotes social engagement on this issue by large numbers of people, it builds awareness and reduces stigma, and promotes a compassionate approach to dementia care based on a thorough understanding of the condition,” she said.

Further research is now being carried out to ascertain how this knowledge is used by those caring for people with dementia.

The Wicking Centre, which is part of the University’s College of Health and Medicine, also runs a highly successful Preventing Dementia MOOC.

For more information on the Wicking Centre’s MOOCs go to <https://mooc.utas.edu.au/courses>

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