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| **Abstract submitted for the 5th NSW Rural Health and Research Congress****Twin Towns, Tweed Heads 9 - 11 November 2016****Congress Stream:** No 4 Palliative/end of life care: meeting the need**Alternate Stream:** No 6 Integrated care and partnerships: rethinking relationships **Abstract Title:** Mind the Gap: addressing the mental health treatment gap in advanced chronic and terminal illness**Author/s:** **Julianne Whyte.** Research Fellow, Listen Acknowledge Respond, Corowa NSW 2633, Australia **Background**The issue of mental health (MH) in palliative patients is well-documented, however there is a skills gap, perceived by patients and healthcare workers alike, when it comes to addressing it. This is even more acute in resource-stretched rural communities. **Approach** A trans-disciplinary social work approach to palliative care was trialled with 100 patients and 250 family members and caregivers across six rural trial sites. Mental health screening, assessment and treatment tools were implemented and evaluated to assess the impact on clinical and emotional outcomes for patients and their caregivers. The model was evaluated using qualitative, semi-structured interviews with patients, caregivers, and service providers. **Outcomes / Results** The trial found symptom management typically took precedence in palliative care, with MH referrals occurring late in the disease trajectory when they are acute or crisis-driven, missing an opportunity to enhance quality of life while there was still life to be lived. Participants reported they valued the psychosocial support provided, their distress had been greatly reduced, and their coping in the bereavement period enhanced.**Take Home Message** 1. Addressing MH in palliative care improves outcomes for patients and caregivers.
2. New resources and free training are available to develop the skills required to address MH concerns in this cohort.
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