

OR37

Bridging the Gaps: Studying misconceptions, knowledge gaps and commonly held beliefs about dementia within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Far North Queensland

Sarah Russell^{1,2}, Edward Strivens^{1,2}, Gavin Miller², Sharon Bonython-Ericson²

¹James Cook University, Cairns, Australia, ²Cairns Hospital, Cairns, Australia

Aims: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have lower life expectancy and worse health outcomes than the general Australian population and an increased risk of dementia within these communities has recently been found (Smith *et al.*, 2008). Although studies have shown that dementia is not widely understood within urban Aboriginal communities (Garvey *et al.* 2011), knowledge in remote communities and in the Torres Strait, where health inequalities are greatest, has not been investigated. As knowledge of symptoms has been linked to willingness to seek treatment and early diagnosis is crucial for optimal treatment of dementia, the aim of this study was to investigate understanding of Alzheimer's disease and dementia amongst remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to clarify variables that influence dementia literacy.

Methods: A total of 462 adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders completed the *Alzheimer's Disease Knowledge Survey for Indigenous Australians* whilst attending three cultural festivals in Far North Queensland. Responses were analyzed to evaluate overall knowledge of Alzheimer's disease and dementia as well as identify commonly held beliefs, misconceptions and knowledge gaps.

Results: Consistent with previous research, dementia knowledge was low (mean score = 5.23 (SD 2.9), range 0–13 out of 20) and did not differ significantly between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Although there was a commonly held belief that memory loss was a central feature of Alzheimer's disease, there were shared misconceptions about the cause, prevalence and treatment of dementia and how dementia is diagnosed.

Conclusion: Results highlighted the importance of developing culturally appropriate interventions to improve dementia literacy amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders given the increased risk of dementia within these communities.

References

- Garvey, G. *et al.* Making sense of dementia: understanding amongst Indigenous Australians. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. 2011. 26. 649–656.
- Smith K, Flicker L, Lautenschlager NT, Almeida OP, Atkinson D, Dwyer A, *et al.* High prevalence of dementia and cognitive impairment in Indigenous Australians. *Neurology*. 2008; 1470–1473.