



Examination of clinician and consumer perspectives on the use of telehealth to access voluntary assisted dying support

Overview

Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) is now available in all Australian states. VAD is a service that permits an eligible person with a terminal illness to end their life through self-administration or practitioner-administration of medication. Although VAD is now legal in all Australian states, the laws are unclear about whether VAD consultations can be provided using telehealth. While the current laws have not been tested in a court of law, it may currently be a criminal offense for clinicians to provide VAD advice through telehealth. Telehealth, the delivery of healthcare from a distance using technology, is used internationally to ensure that individuals, regardless of location, can access consultations and support for VAD services. VAD enables “people who are suffering and dying to choose the manner and timing of their death”. Choice is a central tenet of VAD, yet people living in regional, rural and remote (RRR) locations lack choice if local health services are not providers. Telehealth has the potential to remove these barriers and improve access to VAD information and care for individuals who need it. This research will investigate the impact of using (or not using) telehealth to access VAD services from the perspective of both consumers and clinicians in the Australian context. Funding research regarding the use of telehealth in the VAD space will improve end-of-life care for all Australians, regardless of their location.

The Need

Australian research about the use of telehealth for VAD is limited, and the lack of evidence in this space has a tangible impact on individuals stepping through their end-of-life journey. Therefore, the potential research outcomes are significant for the people affected (e.g. clinicians and eligible patients and their families).

To fund this project, the lead researcher, Dr Helen Haydon (who would oversee the project), requires a donation of

Contact:

Joanne Cherriman
Senior Advancement Manager

E: j.cherriman@uq.edu.au
T: +61 04 4777 8760

\$33,000 for 4 years to provide a PhD scholarship to a high calibre and meritoriously sourced candidate. Such a scholarship would not only progress this important research, but also provides the successful candidate, valuable learning, and research skills as they gain a PhD over a 4-year period. Dr Helen Haydon has numerous established contacts within the clinical VAD community to ensure the feasibility and translation of this research.

Your Impact

Currently people living in RRR Australia often rely on telehealth to gain access to health services. VAD is no exception. Telehealth is currently being used with uncertainty by clinicians to support necessary conversations around VAD to allow equal access regardless of where someone lives. Indeed, telehealth is a frequent topic of conversation and concern among clinicians who raise questions regarding whether they are crossing legal boundaries when providing VAD support via telehealth (video or phone). There is no consumer voice on the matter. This research will build upon a systematic literature review, currently underway, that examines the global evidence detailing the practical and clinical implications (including benefits, risks, outcomes) of telehealth-supported VAD. Exploring clinician and consumer perspectives in Australia, it will inform clinical practice, guide policy and legislation regarding the risks and benefits of telehealth-supported VAD and provide recommendations on best practice models of care. It is expected that this research will provide much needed evidence on which to base legislation, provide clarity for clinicians involved in the delivery of VAD, and potentially increase access to VAD to eligible people in RRR areas.

Thank you

If our project aligns with your interests, we'd be pleased to discuss our recent exciting findings, and honoured to have your support to advance this work to the next level.

