hospital outpatient setting, however community or residential care settings would be more appropriate environments in which to run the CST program as they allow for continuity of care in an environment supportive of participants’ ongoing needs.

Following the pilot study, CST facilitators held training workshops with community and residential care staff from The Whiddon Group. The organisation then trialled CST across a number of its community and residential care facilities in NSW in 2015. Karn Nelson (Whiddon Group’s Executive General Manager Strategic Policy and Research) reports that the CST programs have been highly successful and the organisation is rolling out its version of the program, which it calls Chat, Stories & Tea, in all its services this year (see report p43).

Conclusion
CST offers a cost-effective early intervention program suitable for people with a mild to moderate dementia. The pilot study demonstrated the ease of use in implementing CST in an Australian setting.

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References

Dementia education supports timely diagnosis

Dementia is not yet curable, but the benefits of early diagnosis include access to specialised health care, appropriate interventions and local support services.

Unfortunately, many people with dementia report a significant delay to receiving a confirmed diagnosis of dementia – up to three years from first onset of possible symptoms such as memory concerns (Phillips et al 2011). This time lag leads to uncertainty for individuals and their families. A key issue may be general practitioner (GP) knowledge about dementia.

Dr Allan Shell, an academic GP and visiting Fellow to the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre: Assessment and Better Care, leads pioneering Australian work to improve a more timely diagnosis and better management of dementia in primary care settings. With advice and support from specialist colleagues in psycho-geriatric clinical practice and those involved in dementia research, Dr Shell developed an education program to enhance GP knowledge of dementia, approved by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM).

It offers four options to help GPs assess and better understand dementia risk:
• Accredited (six hour) Dementia Workshop Active Learning Module (ALM) – delivered in person by a facilitator.
• Accredited online version of the ALM.
• Train-the-trainer program to enable GPs to deliver the ALM material to local practices and regions.
• Online ‘dementia-screening-prompt’ tool for use in GP practices.

In the four years since the Timely Diagnosis program started in 2012 more than 1800 GPs have attended the face-to-face Workshop ALMs at 40 different meeting sites around Australia. Also, 20 GPs have attended the ‘train-the-trainer’ ALM, and some of these are now delivering the workshop across Australia.

More than 14 specialists are involved, as associated facilitators, to assist the GPs presenting the Workshop ALM – in addition to those being presented by Dr Shell with a Specialist colleague.

More than 1500 GPs have completed the online ALM since its launch in June 2013. It was developed with the assistance of approved medical education provider Genesis Ed, and is available at www.ThinkGP.com.au and via the DCRCs’ new DementiaKT Hub website at http://dementiakt.com.au/resource/timely-diagnosis-of-dementia/.

Dementia-screening-prompt tool

A key milestone for the project was the launch of the online ‘dementia-screening-prompt’ tool. It was developed and incorporated into Best Practice software (a widely used commercial product), giving a potential reach of more than 3000 medical clinic customers across Australia.

The tool assists a GP to measure, record and report individual dementia risk through a risk assessment prompt. It includes information for daily living, dementia risk factors, advanced care planning and referral information, and links to education materials for families and people with dementia.

Feedback from GPs

The Timely Diagnosis project has collected evaluations from GPs. From surveys of more than 1000 GPs who have completed the Workshop ALM, almost 90% reported improved awareness of dementia – and an appreciation for the relevance of the training material for assessment, diagnosis and better management of dementia in their practice. Feedback from GPs completing the online ALM has been similarly positive.

The Timely Diagnosis project is making great progress, helping professionals in general practice understand, screen and manage dementia better. It builds on other DCRC-led activities for GPs, such as the 14 Essentials of Dementia Care (http://dementiakt.com.au/resource/14-essentials/) and the projects led by Professor Dimitry Pond exploring the roles of practice nurses.

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Measuring GPs’ attitudes and confidence towards dementia see p65.