FINAL REPORT

PREVALENCE OF DEMENTIA IN THE TORRES STRAIT

Dementia Collaborative Research Centre
Assessment and Better Care

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Translating dementia research into practice
Investigators
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PREVALENCE OF DEMENTIA IN THE TORRES STRAIT

BACKGROUND: Recent research indicates an increased prevalence of dementia in Indigenous communities in the Kimberley compared to the general population. It is unclear if Torres Strait Islander communities share this increased prevalence of dementia, although risk factors for dementia, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes are found in higher numbers within Torres Strait Islander communities than in non-Indigenous communities, similar to Australian Aboriginal populations. Recently, all residents over the age of 45 years currently residing on Hammond Island in the Torres Strait were invited to participate in a pilot study to estimate the prevalence of dementia on the Island (N=20). Results suggested a higher prevalence of dementia than within the general population of the same age, but lower than previous research in the Kimberley. Although these results provide preliminary evidence that there may be an increased risk of dementia in the Torres Strait, it is difficult to draw conclusions given the small sample size. Nevertheless, further research is required to establish the prevalence of dementia within the wider Torres Strait community.

AIMS: The aim of present study was to employ a project officer on a part time basis in 2013 to commence consultations with the Torres Strait communities, conduct background research and complete ethics applications for the larger prevalence study in the Torres Strait.

OUTCOMES: The main aims of the study were met and as a result the first phase of the prevalence study in the Torres Strait is due to commence in March 2015. Specific outcomes from the study include consultation and community engagement to obtain community support in the Torres Strait for the study; securing grant funding for the first phase of the study and gaining ethics approvals for the study.

1. Community Consultation and Engagement in the Torres Strait:

In January 2013, members of the research team attended a meeting on Thursday Island with the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Partnership committee, comprising representatives from Queensland Health, Torres Strait Regional Authority, Torres Community Shire Council, FNQ Medical Local, Queensland Ambulance Service, and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). The aims of the project were presented to the committee and formal support for the research was obtained providing the team with a mandate to conduct research in the Torres Strait.

The project officer also engaged in community consultation and developed networks within local health agencies involved in delivering health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Cape York and Torres Strait region. This included education sessions in Cairns and the local Aboriginal community at Yarrabah for health workers and community members by Visiting Professor Tony Broe, Senior Principal Research Fellow, NeuRA and Professor of Geriatric Medicine, UNSW. As well, Aboriginal
Health workers were linked in with a mental health assessment training workshop run by Dr Tracey Westerman in Cairns.

The project officer arranged for team members to attend three community events in Far North Queensland (Laura Aboriginal Cultural Festival in Cape York; Apunipima Health Expo, Cairns, and NAIDOC celebrations, Cairns) to raise dementia awareness within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A survey of dementia awareness within these communities was conducted at these events by the team resulting in the largest survey of dementia knowledge, gaps and misperceptions within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to date (N=462).

2. **Ethics approval** secured from the Far North Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee; James Cook University External Human Research Ethics Committee; and Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service

3. **Grant funding** secured to the value of $60,000 with the Mason Trust to support the first phase of the project: Thursday Island and Badu Island. Other grant applications (e.g. NHMRC project grant) ongoing.