Letter to the Editor

People with an intellectual disability in the discourse of chronic and complex conditions: an invisible group?

TO THE EDITOR: Goddard et al, authors of “People with an intellectual disability in the discourse of chronic and complex conditions: an invisible group?" are to be congratulated for raising discussion about one of the most vulnerable groups in Australia with respect to their receipt of optimal health care. The authors conclude that “developing interventions and strategies to increase the knowledge of health care workers . . . caring for people with intellectual disabilities will likely improve the health care needs of this population and their families”. In relation to this identified need for health professional education and training in the care of people with intellectual disabilities, we would like to draw the attention of your readers to some work undertaken by the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria (CDDHV) to address this issue.

The CDDHV works to improve the health and health care of people with developmental disabilities through a range of educational, research and clinical activities. In recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the need for health professional education in this area. Moreover, as people with disabilities often have chronic and complex health and social issues, focusing on their health care provides a platform for interprofessional education and a springboard for understanding the essential importance and value of interprofessional practice.

Recently, the CDDHV has taken a lead role in developing a teaching and learning resource that focuses both on the health care of people with disabilities and on the importance and value of interprofessional practice. This resource promotes and facilitates interprofessional learning, and develops understanding of the health and health care issues experienced by people with disabilities and those who support them.

“Health and disability: partnerships in action” is a new video-based teaching and learning package, produced through an interprofessional collaboration between health professionals from medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, paramedic practice, health science, social work, speech pathology, dietetics and dentistry. Those living with a disability are the experts on their own experience and so their direct involvement in and contribution to the education of health care professionals is essential. The collaboration between those featured in the video stories and health professionals has led to the development of a powerful resource that facilitates students and practitioners developing insights into the health and health care issues encountered by people with developmental disabilities. We also believe that through improving their understanding of, and health provision to, people with disabilities and those who support them, health professionals will acquire valuable attitudes, knowledge and skills applicable to many other patients in their practice population.

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