

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW South Coast dental care advocate a finalist in aged care awards

An aged care manager who set up an onsite dental clinic at Dalmeny, north of Narooma, has been recognised for her drive and persistence in pursuing the new clinic.

Helen Spence — Area Manager of IRT Aged Care — oversaw the construction of an onsite dental service at IRT Dalmeny so residents could access regular dental care, improving their health and quality of life.

Ms Spence is one of five finalists in the Individual Distinction category of the 2015 HESTA Aged Care Awards. The Awards recognise those who make an exceptional contribution to improving the quality of life of older Australians.

Ms Spence said the project took a year to complete and involved liaising with project partners, the Department of Health and Ageing, local dentists and dental supply companies.

"We needed to source funding for the Dalmeny dental room, draw up the plans, choose and purchase equipment, oversee the build and search for a dentist to visit our care centre," Ms Spence said.

"The facility is now fitted out with the latest equipment and provides a quality environment for dentists and hygienists to manage the oral and dental care of our residents."

The service also operates as a modern learning environment with tutorials delivered to staff by dentists.

"We are extremely fortunate to have secured the services of a volunteer dentist, Dr Graham Thomas, who sees patients once a week at the clinic."

Ms Spence said a partnership with the local hospital's dental clinic was important to the project's success.

The clinic hosted a project for the hospital dental clinic's graduate oral hygienist — that provided successful outcomes for residents — and Ms Spence hopes to host dental students in the future.

"It is a challenging environment to work in, given a large number of our clients have dementia. We had to do a lot of groundwork to familiarise them with the clinic so they would be comfortable seeing a dentist.

"The oral health of our residents has improved significantly, with fewer cases of ulcers, cavities and mouth pain, which leads to improved nutritional intake.

"Developing the clinic into a commercial venture is now a focus, so we can open the service to other residents in the broader Dalmeny area."

Finalists are in the running for a share of the \$30,000 prize pool provided by proud sponsor, industry super funds' owned bank, **ME**.

The Team Innovation and Outstanding Organisation Award winners each receive a \$10,000 development grant. The Individual Distinction Award winner will receive a \$5,000 **ME EveryDay** transaction account and \$5,000 towards further education.

ME CEO Jamie McPhee said: "we're delighted to give these outstanding individuals the opportunity to develop and continue to progress their profession, and support innovative health programs that ultimately benefit the entire industry and community."

The winners will be revealed at the HESTA Aged Care Awards dinner on Thursday 27 August in Canberra. Learn more about the Awards at hestaawards.com.au

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*The 2015 HESTA Aged Care Awards is an initiative of HESTA, run in partnership with the National Aged Care Alliance and proudly sponsored by **ME**.*