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Alice team wins top honour for new Indigenous care

A team of Alice Springs health workers and patients has won a national award for providing innovative holistic care for Aboriginal patients with end stage renal failure.

The Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku (WDNWPT) team took out the Team Excellence category in the HESTA Primary Health Care Awards, held in partnership with the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

The WDNWPT team started their journey 11 years ago, when artists from two bush communities raised \$1 million to create Purple House – a base where patients with kidney disease could become well enough to travel home for dialysis in remote communities in the Western Desert.

Today Purple House provides a range of primary care services including a GP clinic with indigenous trainees, registered nurses, social support workers, a podiatrist, exercise physiologist, Chinese medicine, bush medicine, Ngangkari traditional healers, a dialysis nurse and a driver.

WDNWPT manager Sarah Brown said services were provided to 76 patients and their families in four locations, and the team was liaising with other communities in the NT, WA and SA to share the model.

“Working with people with end stage renal failure who are far from home can be difficult and emotionally draining work. Our team works hard to support each other and help people to have the very best quality of life both in Alice and back out bush. The patient and their families are active members of this team and help to run the Purple House and the organisation,” Ms Brown said.

“The success of the Purple House is a health promotion outcome in itself. People are so proud of what they have managed to achieve.”

Ms Brown said the basics of the service could and were being translated to other communities and language groups.

“As more people return to their own communities for dialysis we are changing the face of renal disease. Purple House is about optimism and hope and staying part of your community while you are receiving care,” she said.

As an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, Purple House is run by a board of directors who are dialysis patients, or the family of dialysis patients.

The service supports Pintupi, Warlpiri and Western Arrente communities. This month, a new dialysis truck will be introduced to travel to bush communities, providing dialysis to patients at home on country, and encouraging early screening for kidney disease.

The HESTA Primary Health Care Award winners were announced at a gala dinner during AGPN’s National Forum. Each winner received \$5,000 in an ME Bank Online Savings Account and \$5,000 towards further education or implementation of their program or initiative.

HESTA CEO Anne-Marie Corboy congratulated the Alice Springs team and other category winners. “The HESTA Primary Health Care Awards recognise frontline health workers helping their communities battle cancer, chronic disease, mental illness and injury. They are an opportunity to celebrate three outstanding contributions and to reflect on the amazing job done every day in primary health,” Ms Corboy said.

More information: Michelle Edmunds 0413 120 342. Photographs available.