

# HELPING STUDENTS UNDERSTAND

La Trobe University's Associate Professor of Rural and Regional Speech Pathology, Dr Bernice Mathisen has been taking part in a collaborative research project aimed at incorporating palliative care into university courses, including speech pathology.



Associate Professor Mathisen cites her favourite quote from Barbato, 2000: 'We talk about death but we don't really know about it.'

'Speech pathologists may be shocked when they are faced with the death of a patient, largely because palliative care is currently not included in their university course to a great degree,' said Associate Professor Mathisen.

'It's not unusual for speech pathologists to treat patients who have had a stroke and need help with communication and swallowing problems. Other patients that they may deal with include those with terminal illnesses such as cancer, Motor Neurone Disease (MND), Multiple Sclerosis (MS) as well as extremely preterm infants, so they are working with patients across the lifespan,' said Associate Professor Mathisen.

Associate Professor Mathisen said that the research, which is funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, aims to get undergraduate students to understand palliative care.

Associate Professor Mathisen worked on the project with primary researcher Associate Professor Patsy Yates from the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane and Ms Penny Crofts from the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle.

The research culminated in a website ([www.pcc4u.org](http://www.pcc4u.org)) with a series of case studies on palliative care and other learning resources for staff and students that could be used in each year of the four-year Bachelor of Health Sciences/Master of Speech Pathology or two-year Master of Speech Pathology course offered at Bendigo.

The new curriculum was designed specifically for speech pathology students. In their first year, the course aims to get students to talk about the subject from a personal perspective. They examine the effects of dealing with grief, loss and bereavement in a clinical setting in the next year. In third year, students incorporate their knowledge of palliative care in adult and paediatric clinical settings and in the final year, students integrate the personal and the professional aspects of palliative care.

## MORE INFORMATION

Further information on research opportunities in the La Trobe Rural Health School can be found at: [latrobe.edu.au/health/about/schools/la-trobe-rural-health-school](http://latrobe.edu.au/health/about/schools/la-trobe-rural-health-school)