

# Media release

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**Clinical  
Oncological  
Society of  
Australia**

## Better care of terminally ill helps spouses live longer

Providing better care of people with terminal illnesses like cancer can result in their spouses living longer, according to a visiting international health expert.

Professor Nicholas Christakis, from Harvard Medical School, said a study of 200,000 couples had shown that up to one per cent of spouses lived longer when their dying partners were given a high quality of care, compared to those who weren't as well cared for.

Speaking today at the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting, the largest gathering of cancer experts in Australia, Professor Christakis said bereaved spouses whose partner had experienced a "good death" were 10 per cent less likely to die during bereavement than those whose partner had experienced a "conventional death".

"Where terminally ill cancer patients experience a "good death", there is a flow-on health benefit for their partners, as well as family and friends," he said. "Conversely when it is a 'bad death' because of poorer quality care, the impact on family and close friends can have negative health consequences. It is what we call the 'non-biological spread of disease'."

Professor Christakis said researchers were "surprised by the magnitude of the effect" and that the findings would be of significance for health professionals, patients and family in making care choices for the terminally ill.

He said there was also a health economics argument: "If there is good palliative care, patients don't suffer as much pain, are not as physically sick and require less medical intervention. This makes palliative care worth the cost.

"It also follows that with health stresses on partners and other family members eased, then they in turn will have reduced demands on the health system. So there are additional economic advantages to palliative care that are not accounted for, but should be."

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