

End of Life Law for Clinicians: A training program to support clinical practice

About End of Life Law for Clinicians

Research has demonstrated that significant legal knowledge gaps exist amongst specialists involved in end-of-life decision-making. The End of Life Law for Clinicians project ('ELLC') aims to improve clinicians' (medical practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals) and medical students' legal knowledge and practice by developing and delivering training on the law relating to palliative and end-of-life care.

This three-year Project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the Public Health and Chronic Disease Grant Program, and administered by the Australian Centre for Health Law Research (ACHLR), Faculty of Law, Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The Project Team comprises:

- Professor Ben White, Professor of Law, ACHLR, Faculty of Law, QUT
- Professor Lindy Wilmott, Professor of Law, ACHLR, Faculty of Law, QUT
- Distinguished Professor Patsy Yates, AM, Executive Dean, Faculty of Health, QUT
- Associate Professor Shih-Ning Then, ACHLR, Faculty of Law, QUT.

The Project is supported by a Project Coordinator (Penny Neller) and an expert national Advisory Committee.

ELLC has received ethics approval from the QUT Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC reference number: 1800000124).

Background

Prior [research conducted by members of the project team](#) and colleagues revealed that significant knowledge gaps about end of life law exist amongst Australian medical practitioners. This study focused on withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining treatment from adults who lack decision-making capacity, including the role of Advance Care Directives.

There are also concerns that some people approaching the end of life do not receive appropriate palliative care i.e. adequate pain and symptom relief, leading to under-palliation.

Not knowing the law creates risks for clinicians including: practice that breaches the law, potentially resulting in civil liability or criminal prosecution; doctors practising defensive medicine; poor doctor-patient communication; and conflict with patients, families or substitute decision-makers.

Patient care and welfare may also be compromised. For example, inadequate legal knowledge can lead to treatment being wrongly removed or wrongly given, inadequate pain relief being provided, and clinical practice that is inconsistent with patients' wishes.

Doctors participating in the research said they wanted to know more about end of life law to help improve their practice and manage legal risk. ELLC seeks to address these issues.

Aims and objectives

ELLC aims to address current gaps in clinicians' knowledge of end of life law by delivering online training resources and workshops nationally to medical practitioners (including specialists and trainee specialists; and junior medical practitioners), nurses and allied health professionals, and medical students.

ELLC's objectives are to improve this cohort's knowledge and awareness of end of life law, and enhance their confidence and capacity to manage legal issues in end of life decision-making. Participation in the training program will benefit clinicians and medical students by:

- enhancing their knowledge of the law, and application of the law in clinical practice;
- preparing them to manage future legal risks in practice; and
- supporting them to deliver quality end of life care.

ELLC training program

The ELLC training program comprises **10 free online training modules on end of life law, and training workshops across Australia**. The training modules are available at the [End of Life Law for Clinicians training portal](#). Topics addressed include:

1. The role of law in end of life care
2. Capacity and consent to medical treatment
3. Withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining medical treatment
4. Advance Care Planning and Advance Care Directives
5. Substitute decision-making for medical treatment
6. Providing palliative medication
7. Children and end of life decision-making
8. Futile or non-beneficial treatment
9. Emergency treatment for adults
10. Managing conflict.

New modules are in development and will be available in 2021. Case-study based workshops will also be delivered across Australia in the future (dates to be confirmed).

The ELLC training is complemented by [End of Life Law in Australia](#), a website which provides comprehensive information about end of life law across all Australian States and Territories.

This education is a CPD Activity under the Royal Australian Colleges of General Practitioners (RACGP) CPD Program, and an Accredited Activity under the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine's (ACCRM) Professional Development Program for the 2020-2022 triennium. ELLC is also approved for 5 Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM) CPD hours to December 2021.



Continuing professional development points may also be available from other specialty Colleges and medical professional organisations for the training program (modules and workshops).

To discuss the training contact the ELLC Team at endoflifelaw@qut.edu.au.

