

Tasmanian dementia training course proves popular as number of sufferers increases

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By [Airlie Ward](#)

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An online course to assist dementia carers developed by the University of Tasmania is attracting growing international interest.

The Understanding Dementia Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was developed by Professor Andrew Robinson and neurologist Professor James Vickers.

The course is free and suitable for healthcare professionals, carers and people in the early stages of the disease.

Since it began two years ago its reach has grown significantly, from 9,000 participants from 65 countries to 50,000 participants from more than 120 countries.

Professors Robinson and Vickers saw there was a need to improve awareness about dementia and how to best treat sufferers.

There are more than 300,000 Australians currently living with dementia and that is expected to triple by the middle of this century.

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David Bartlett IT consultant

Yet Professor Robinson said their research revealed that up to half of nurses and a quarter of general practitioners did not know dementia was a terminal condition.

"If people do not know that people with dementia are dying, the care they provide is not configured in a way which supports them to have the best quality of life across that inevitable trajectory to death," he said.

The pair established the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre at UTAS as a multi-disciplined approach to dementia care.

They also set up a bachelor degree in dementia care at the university which is now the third largest course on offer at UTAS.

But the impressive growth of their online course has led some to tout dementia care studies as a potential multi-million-dollar education export for Tasmania.

Former Tasmanian premier David Bartlett, an IT expert who was brought on board to help realise the MOOC's commercial potential, said the online course was a vital addition to state exports.

"The Wicking Understanding Dementia MOOC is probably the most important and the most significant education export in Tasmania's history," he said.

He said there had been interest from the aged care sector and governments across Asia.

Mr Bartlett said Wicking had fielded requests from overseas employers to tailor a course for their staff.

"I believe with the right strategic decisions made at this point there's tens, if not hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue in selling educational product across the world," he said.