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Heritage Identification study published by the Medical Journal of Australia

Health Consumers' Council is proud to have been involved in a Heritage Identification study recently published by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

As the peak advocacy body for patients' rights in WA, Health Consumers' Council was consulted during the study which formally documented the frequency of references to a patient's cultural heritage during medical handover and in hospital medical records.

Lead author Dr David Morgan, a visiting medical specialist in the South Metropolitan Health Service in WA, and colleagues conducted a four-phase observational study that highlighted inconsistencies in identifying the cultural heritage of patients when transferring clinical information.

"After adjusting for demographic, socio-economic and medical factors, Aboriginal patients were significantly more likely to be identified than patients from all other ethnic-national backgrounds," Dr Morgan and colleagues wrote.

Identifying the cultural heritage of patients is controversial; while some authors regard it as irrelevant and perhaps subject to prejudice, others advocate collecting the information in order to identify disparities in health care. Among the patients whose ethnic-national background was identified in this study (142 of 1018, 14%), an explicit rationale was provided by the identifying doctors for fewer than 20 per cent of identifications.

Health Consumers' Council Aboriginal Engagement Officer Tania Harris said that the study was likely to encourage further research into the impact heritage identification has on patient care.

"Our hope is that this research will play a role in opening further discussions about cultural awareness and knowledge of the diversity of Aboriginal people among physicians, and disparities in health care," she said.

"Are our hospitals identifying Aboriginal patients appropriately and for reasons that are going to improve their healthcare and outcomes, or is it leading to racial profiling?"

The study concluded that further research and community consultation was needed to understand why Aboriginal people were more likely to be identified than patients from all other ethnic-national backgrounds.

Dr Morgan and colleagues' research is available on the *Medical Journal of Australia* website. The *Medical Journal of Australia* is a publication of the Australian Medical Association.

Health Consumers' Council (WA) Inc
Unit 6, 40 Lord St, East Perth WA 6004
GPO Box C134, Perth WA 6839
T: 9221 3422 | F: 9221 5435
E: info@hconc.org.au W: www.hconc.org.au

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Study authors:

David JR Morgan, South Metropolitan Health Service, Perth, WA
Tania Harris, Health Consumers' Council (WA), Perth, WA
Ron Gidgup, South Metropolitan Health Service, Perth, WA
Martin Whitely, John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, Curtin University, Perth, WA

ENDS

Tania Harris

Aboriginal Engagement Officer

T: 9221 3422 | F: 9221 5435

E: tania.harris@hconc.org.au

About Health Consumers' Council

The Health Consumers' Council (WA) Inc. is an independent, not for profit organisation passionate about ensuring the consumer is at the heart of our state's health care system. HCC is an advocate for patients in WA.

We offer a unique perspective on health policy and service delivery matters. By offering individual patient advocacy, systemic advocacy, and an engagement program for the WA community, we ensure the consumer voice is heard at the highest level. Our Aboriginal Engagement Officer and our Culture and Diversity Co-ordinator ensure Aboriginal communities and people from non-English speaking backgrounds are considered in health service planning and can have their say on health service reform.

HCC receives funding from State agencies.

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