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## Dental hygiene student placement in residential aged care facilities: What do the students gain from the placement experience?

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**Aim:** The aim of this study was to determine whether dental hygiene students from the University of Newcastle, Australia, attending residential aged care facilities (RACFs) during a placement program gained any knowledge about the oral care of elderly patients and the RACF environment.

**Method:** Final year dental hygiene students undertook a 12-week placement, one day per week, in one of 17 residential aged care facilities on the NSW Central Coast. Students completed pre and post-placement questionnaires, which recorded their knowledge of medical, dental and environmental issues related to older people. The placement questionnaires used five point Likert scales, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, pre- and post-mean scores were produced for each question and P values calculated using a paired t-test.

**Results:** Thirty three students attended the placement, 26 (79%) completed both the pre- and post-placement questionnaires. Post-placement mean scores as compared to pre-placement mean scores showed significant improvement in student knowledge of medical ( $P < 0.05$ ) and dental ( $P < 0.05$ ) conditions specific to the older person and improvement in knowledge ( $P < 0.05$ ) about the residential aged care facility environment.

**Conclusion:** The placement program enhanced student knowledge across three subject categories; medical and dental conditions of the older person and the structure and services of the residential aged care environment.

### Biography

Dr Janet Wallace is an Oral Health Therapist Lecturer at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Janet has extensive experience in clinical practice and a special interest in teaching experiential oral health student learning in aged care. In 2009, Janet implemented a residential aged care student placement program for final year dental hygiene students; this research has generated international publications, national and international conference presentations and significant grants to expand the research. Janet is a member of the Faculty of Health and Medicine, Faculty Board at the University of Newcastle, a life member of ADOHTA, a peer reviewer for the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Dental and Oral Health Therapy and an appointed member of the Dental Council of NSW.

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