

# Media Release

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## **Clients living with a dementia illness enjoy 'home' in hospital**

Families are key to the enjoyment of life of older dementia clients in the in-patient units at Tauranga Hospital.

It's Mental Health Awareness Week and mental health staff are keen to let people know that living with a dementia illness can be a positive, uplifting experience even for those who can no longer live at home unassisted.

Life in the older person's in-patient unit is as close to a home life as possible for clients, who get up when they are ready, have breakfast in bed if they want to and plan their own daily routines, rhythms and habits.

Clinical nurse coordinator in the unit, Ruth Thomas says visiting hours are unrestricted as families are often an important part of the client's life and their knowledge is highly valued by the team. "They have a wealth of knowledge about the client's life before they were ill and this helps us to help them have as much enjoyment as possible during their stay in the unit."

"It is also important to us to offer support to the families through what can be a very difficult time, particularly if their relative needs long term care," she says. "The unit is as homely as a hospital ward can be made with photos, personal items, soft furnishings and family games," she says. Even meal times are a family affair, with staff and clients eating together at a table set with brightly coloured place settings.

Care of people living with a dementia illness has shifted in recent years from treating symptoms and containing behaviour to helping people live with their symptoms. “We try and explore the reasons behind some behaviours which in turn helps us help the client either modify their behaviour to enable their carer, who is usually a spouse, to continue to care for them at home,” she says. “If this is not possible we aim to help the person maintain the habits and activities that they value and enjoy.”

A skills-maintenance focus helps ensure a positive approach to care and recovery, and staff work on looking beyond the presenting illness to view the person behind the symptoms and behaviours.

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For more information please contact:

*Carol Wollaston*  
*Communications Manager*  
*BOP District Health Board*  
*Tel: 07 579 8411*  
*Carol.wollaston@bopdhb.govt.nz*