

Respect in an Ageing Society

Launch of research findings, 2 March 2010

Benetas CEO Sandra Hills' speech

- Thank you to
 - David Mellor for his speech and explanation of research
 - Thank you for his team's work
 - Look forward to future ventures in partnership with Deakin University
- The paper we are launching today is titled Respect in an Ageing Society - but why this title? Report after report, particularly the recently released Intergenerational Report confirms that we are well and truly heading towards an ageing society:
 - By 2050 it's expected that the number of people aged 65 to 84 will more than double.
 - The number of people aged 85 and over will more than quadruple.
 - So, in just 40 years, nearly one quarter of Australia's population will be aged 65 and over (compared to 13 per cent today).
 - What's more, a recent report from Access Economics, commissioned by Alzheimer's Australia, predicts that by 2050 over 1.1 million people will have dementia. Without a medical breakthrough this will mean dementia will be the major disease of this century.
- This report, and The Intergenerational Report, has shown us how the ageing population is expected to impact Australian society in economic terms.
- We've decided to look at the flip side - how attitudes of Australians are set to impact the ageing population. Most specifically, the impact of respect (or lack of) for older Australians. Surprisingly, this is the first study in Australia to investigate respect for the older generation.
- But *why* commission this piece of work in the first place?
 - Something we've never done before
 - A new area for Benetas
 - Looking at the bigger issues rather than just caring for the people in our services
- Linked to strategic plan (released in November) which outlines a new direction for our organisation.

- We're currently seeing multiple reports published about the importance of active ageing.
 - At Benetas we are striving towards a **positive, fulfilling experience of ageing**. It's about ageing with dignity - participation and inclusion. It's about ageing with RESPECT.
 - Also committed to build our evidence base for Benetas services and use this to inform how we care for older Victorians. This particular piece of research was the first step.
- So what are we going to do with the findings?
 - You'll see in the paper Associate Professors Marita McCabe and David Mellor recommend human service providers would benefit from a greater understanding of how best to achieve respect for older population.
 - Many studies also recently released show the impact of disrespect through neglect and mistreatment of the frail and the ill.
 - They join me in the belief that research on respect for older Australians could not have come at a better time.
 - I have prepared a series of policy implications and recommended actions for government and industry responding to the three key messages to come from the research. We'll also use the findings to further develop the Benetas model of care for our clients.
- The **first area** to focus on is the **place of older people in society**.
 - Research shows a vast generational difference about the value of older people in society.
 - Younger generations hold ageist attitudes, with older people perceived as being unproductive and lacking ambition
 - We recommend the older generation needs to be more visible in society to gain respect (stay active, involved in life). For example, the 'Active Ageing' for HACC policy services needs continued development and implementation.
 - Develop intergenerational initiatives focusing on sharing the skills, knowledge and experience of older people. The Intergenerational Report points to the need to maintain a growing/stable workforce - and older people certainly need, and can, be a part of this.
- Our **second key learning** to come from the findings is that we must improve and work towards the **social inclusion of older Australians**.

- The Federal Government Social Inclusion agenda states that social inclusion involves opportunities for employment, access to services, connecting with others, dealing with personal crisis and being heard.
- Our study shows older people are having problems with at least two areas - communicating and being listened to or consulted with.
- Australia is unique in our geographical dispersion of families. In other countries, generations of families live under the one roof. Whereas in Australia, generations are spread across the country.
- This has led to lack of continual care and respect for the older generation from their families. They struggle to stay in touch, forced to use phone, text and email to communicate which has proven to be problematic. One Generation Y member is quoted as saying, "I know that my family is spread over the country - Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, Canberra. So it's tough for everyone to short support for my grandma."
- Our findings show the changing family unit in Australia - smaller families, divorces, dual-career marriages, younger people with higher incomes etc lead to a lack of family involvement for older people. One of the members of the older group of research participants said, "I think it's very tough now compared to in my day. In my day the mother was at home, but now everyone is working hard, even mum. So there is no one at home to look after me."
- Many participants perceived that older people were not consulted on family matters or problems faced in today's society.
- Benetas recommends an analysis of existing projects aimed at reducing social isolation among older people is undertaken. We then need to create new initiatives or expand existing strategies such as the Anglicare Australia 'Keeping Connected' program which received funding from Minister Elliot. Anglicare are working with the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence to develop a social inclusion training manual - Benetas will be using this to train our staff.
- We require further development of assistive technologies to promote independence and social engagement - as well as the establishment of community hubs or programs that allow older people to socialise and pursue hobbies.
- We can explore opportunities for increased intergenerational contact through aged care providers, community groups, education and employment agencies. A volunteer involved in the research commented, "The young people don't know how to respect and how to interact, and there's that awkwardness...I think they would respect the older people but have no understanding of how to relate."

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- **Area three is all about consumer choice**
 - Research findings show the older generation identified feelings of respect through having a choice in regards to their living options. Increasing choice in aged care services was also a key recommendation in the NH&HR Commission Report last year.
 - Aged care providers should identify ways in which older people can exercise greater choice. eg consumer directed care
 - Training packages for aged care staff should focus on person-centred care, interpersonal relationships, values and consumer rights

So, in conclusion:

- Respect is a key component of a good quality of life for all Australians - and in particular, our older generation.
 - It's been shown that social supports such as friendships, and remaining an active and respected member of local communities is critical for the good health and wellbeing of older Australians.
 - In turn, the wellbeing of older people is inextricably linked to their engagement with others, and research shows social activities can lower the risk of mortality as much as regular exercise.
- The benefits of a healthy older population for the nation are clear:
 - Healthy older people are likely to stay in the work force for longer;
 - They will enjoy retirement with fewer health care needs, disease and disability;
 - There will be less pressure on the health budget and carers.
- So, just as healthy and active ageing has become a key area of focus for both government and industry, so too should respect - its critical for Australia's future as an ageing society.