



**UNIVERSITY CENTRE  
FOR RURAL HEALTH  
NORTH COAST**  
*education research workforce*

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Thursday 10 September 2015**

### **Institutional racism still affecting Aboriginal renal patients**

A PhD thesis on rural Aboriginal people's experiences with renal (kidney) care, especially in-centre haemodialysis, has shown that institutional racism continues to impact negatively on their wellbeing.

The research by renal nurse and University of Sydney doctoral candidate Liz Rix drew on lengthy discussions with Aboriginal renal patients in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. She believes similar views would be held by many Indigenous renal patients across Australia, despite the unique cultural characteristics of each Aboriginal community.

Her research also included the experiences of health professionals involved in the care of Indigenous patients with renal disease, which Australian Aboriginal people experience at a rate eight times higher than non-Aboriginal Australians.

Crucially, 'institutional', rather than individual, racism was found to be a barrier to effective care for Aboriginal renal patients. Examples of this included residual trauma from 'Stolen Generation' experiences, and cultural insensitivity in areas of the healthcare system.

"I found minimal racism at the individual level, with both participant groups demonstrating the motivation and goodwill for improved relationships and better understanding between them," Liz Rix said.

No previous studies in rural Australia have explored the experience of Aboriginal patients with haemodialysis or renal services delivery, and of those providing their care.

Among the findings was that 'Family' is a key motivator for persevering with haemodialysis, a demanding process that lasts up to six hours and must usually be undertaken three times a week if done in-centre.

While Liz Rix is not an Indigenous person, she has been invited to present a paper on her research at the October conference of the American Indigenous Research Association in Pablo, Montana USA. Her paper, "Can a white Aussie woman 'get it'? Using an Indigenist paradigm to inform culturally sensitive mainstream renal services for Aboriginal peoples in rural Australia", focuses on her role working as a renal nurse and a researcher in an Indigenous setting.

University Centre for Rural Health director Professor Lesley Barclay AO said, "Liz Rix's research is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge about one of the major diseases affecting Aboriginal people, not just on the North Coast but Australia-wide.

"She has done brilliant research in a field that is clinically and culturally complex, and the future beneficiaries will include renal patients and the health professionals who help care for them."



**Photo: Liz Rix with the painting 'The journey of Aboriginal people in regional & rural NSW on Haemodialysis' by the late Patsy Nagus who assisted with her doctoral research.**

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