

MEDIA RELEASE

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Helping new arrivals

Staff from Toowoomba Hospital got together with Mercy Community Services recently to help North African families living in Toowoomba.

Members of Toowoomba Hospital's Social Work, Obstetric and Paediatric teams, along with Chalres Kitapindu, settlement grants worker with Mercy Community Services, joined forces to facilitate a series of health care information days.

Dr Geoff Fisher, Director of Medical Services at Toowoomba Hospital, said the information days were an excellent way to give the families an insight into the range of health care services available to them.

"The HHS is here to serve the needs of the community, and this program has been provided for people from a part of the community that would not have had the same experiences or history in accessing the services we offer," Dr Fisher said.

"I think we had plenty of good discussion with good input from both the presenters and the audience, with the end result being improved understanding all round."

Presentations were provided on topics including birthing and baby care, outpatient clinics and hospitalisation services, health issues for new families and dietary advice, with Swahili and Arabic-speaking interpreters on hand to assist.

Toowoomba Hospital-based social worker Bronwyn Brabrook said the information days were designed to deal with the cultural gap between different concepts of health care provision.

"There are more than 3,000 refugees on humanitarian visas currently living in Toowoomba, so this is a significant population within our community," Ms Brabrook said.

"What we're trying to do is to get people to come in and become familiar with the hospital and talk about different understandings of what health care means within different cultures.

"It's also about getting people feeling comfortable being here, hearing about their understanding of health care and addressing any questions they have."

Social worker Jenny Withnall highlighted the stresses that new arrivals are expected to deal with, and the support they need.

"Western society is extremely fast-paced and complex so to expect people from rural Africa to suddenly be conforming to various requirements where they have to sign forms and report to certain agencies at a certain time, people can become unstuck sometimes," Ms Withnall said.

"If we want people to settle in successfully and become part of the local community it's extremely important to let them know there are services and support available, because we

have to remember they can be suffering trauma, stemming from the fact that they're unable to return to their homes, they've lost their community and home country, and they're probably still in a state of mourning about what they've been through.

"They need support and they need to be made to feel welcome, so we need to do as much as we can to make that happen."

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