

Jem Darling's legacy a gift to nation's health

[Stephen Lunn](#) March 29, 2021



Matt Darling with daughter Peri, 18, and son Tom, 11. Picture: Martin Ollman

It was the hours and hours by his infant daughter Jem's hospital bedside, watching harried nurses and care staff fill out endless paperwork and seeing the potential for errors, that started Matt Darling thinking there had to be a better way.

"I observed so many errors and missed care, driven by the distraction of administration," the Canberra-based information technology innovator says. "It's a tragedy for workers in healthcare as well as patients. Clinical staff deserve better support.

"I remember when an analgesic patch was used for Jem, supposedly to make drawing blood less painful. Pain relief is only there for an hour after application. No one came to take blood for eight hours but because they saw a patch, they thought there was pain relief.

"I was asked to hold my daughter still while a registrar took a blood sample from the sole of her foot. She was in agony," he said. "It was no one's fault. The complexity of the workplace was the problem."

Out of tragedy came hope. Thirteen years after his daughter died at 19 months from brain cancer, his determination to find a way to streamline a patient's care journey is stronger than ever. Jem's legacy could benefit hospital patients and more than 200,000

nursing home residents in Australia, with a world-first documentation and clinical workflow IT system revolutionising the way care is delivered.

The system, designed by Mr Darling's IT firm Humanetix, has been the subject of a federal government-funded trial at a 170-bed nursing home over the past two years, with potentially game-changing results.

An assessment of the trial by the University of Canberra found the technology freed up 20 per cent of every shift by automating many administrative tasks, leaving more time for personal care. For each shift, that translates to 96 minutes of extra care time per carer, the equivalent of adding an extra 15 full-time care staff in a typical 150-bed home. Scaled nationally, this would add an extra 5000 full-time nurses and 14,000 full-time carers.

"The overall quality of resident care increased, with staff being able to spend more time with residents ... and being better equipped to manage the 'delicacies of dignity'," the report said.

Council of the Ageing chief executive Ian Yates said the trial "results provide a critical proof of what can be achieved using IT when the focus is on quality".

It has been a long journey for Mr Darling. "Jem inspired this work. It is her legacy. I hope she would be proud."



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