Gippsland Region
Palliative Care Consortium
Life and Death Matters

Measuring Confidence and Capability Growth in Palliative Care:

The Palliative Care Skills Matrix and the Transition to Specialty Palliative Care Practice Course (TSP) in Gippsland, Victoria

Gippsland Region Palliative Care Consortium

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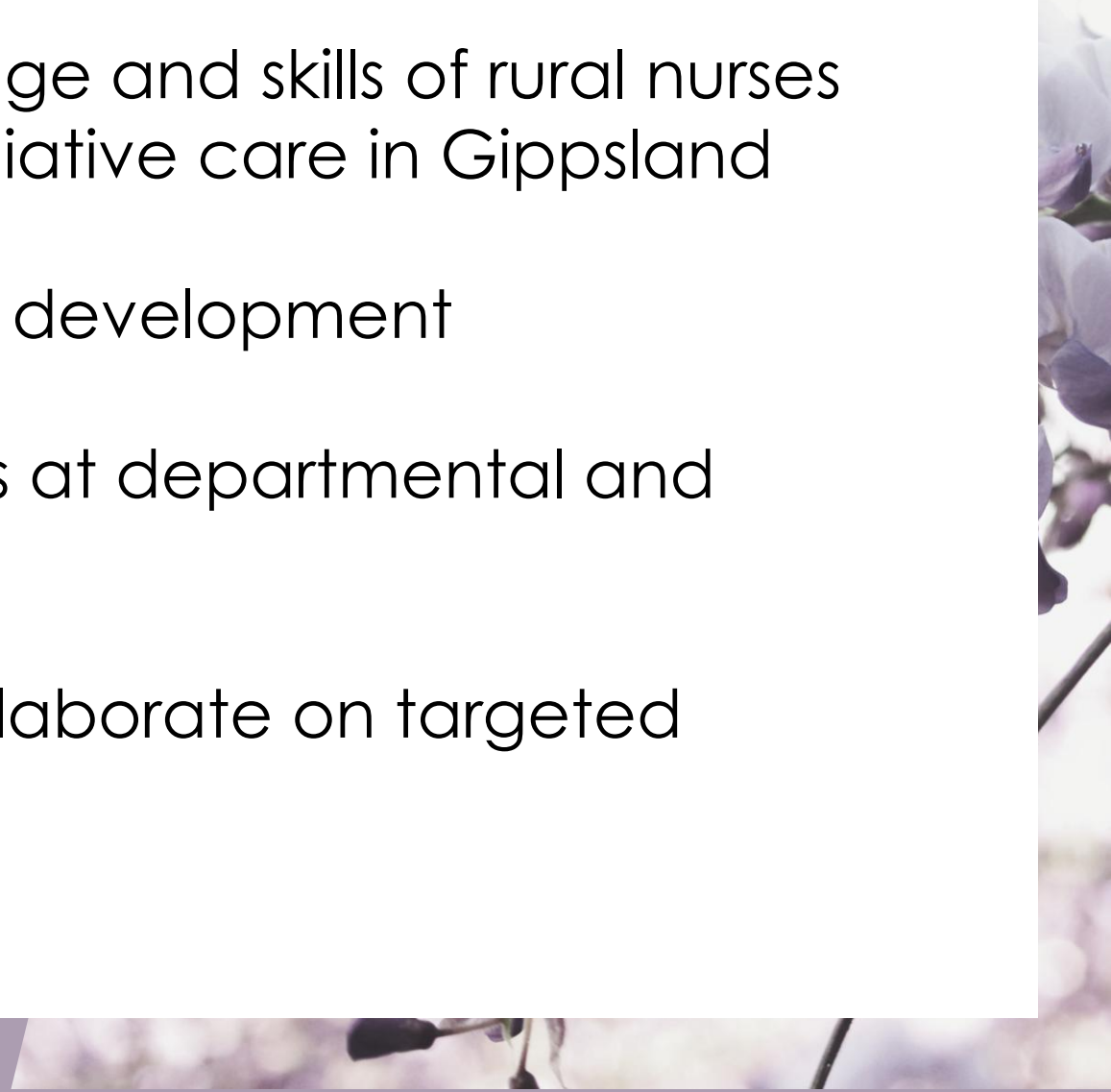
Setting the scene-

- Nurses are the largest health professional group providing palliative care (Singer et al. 2016)
- Rural and regional contexts add complexity to palliative care delivery
- Lower palliative care nursing rate (Gippsland PHN, 2025)
- Higher rate of non admitted palliative care service events

Initiative Overview

- To explore the self-rated knowledge and skills of rural nurses working in community-based palliative care in Gippsland
- To support individual professional development
- To inform planning and responses at departmental and service levels
- To scope regional needs and collaborate on targeted professional development



Palliative care skills matrix

- Aligned with the National Palliative Care Standards of Practice (Standards 1–6)

- Nurses completed self-rated questions related to:
  - Assessment and care provision
  - Accessing services
  - Communication with patients, families and services

- Additional questions explored clinical practice supports

- Confidence-based prompts, e.g. "*How confident are you in…?*"

Palliative Care Self Assessment Skills Matrix

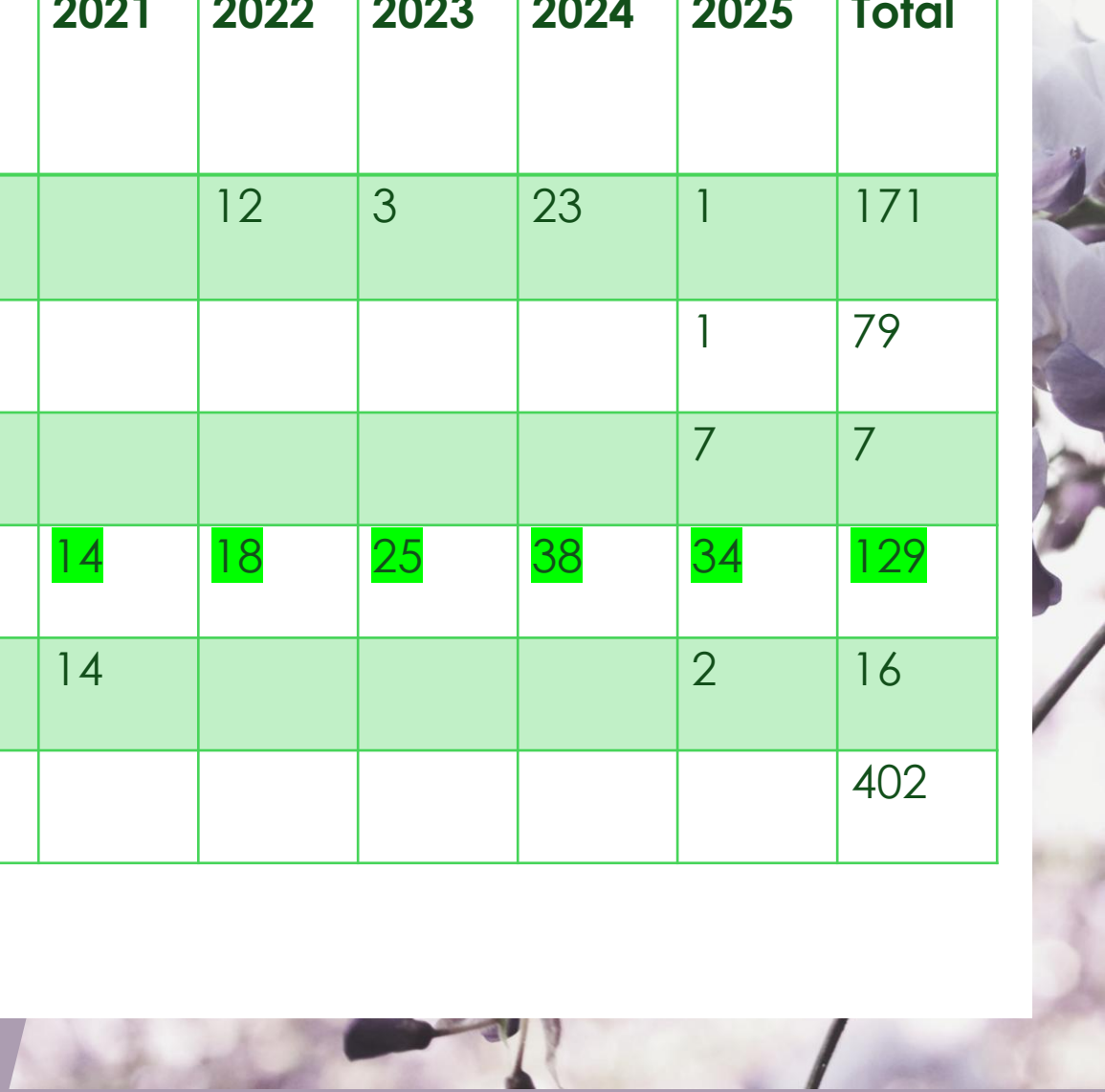
Palliative Care Skills Matrix Questionnaire

- 123 items - electronic
- Self-rating scale (Benner,1982)

No Experience	Basic Knowledge	Can do skill with supervision	Can perform independently	Can teach others
>25%		>25%	>50%	
GAP		CONSOLIDATION	STRENGTH	

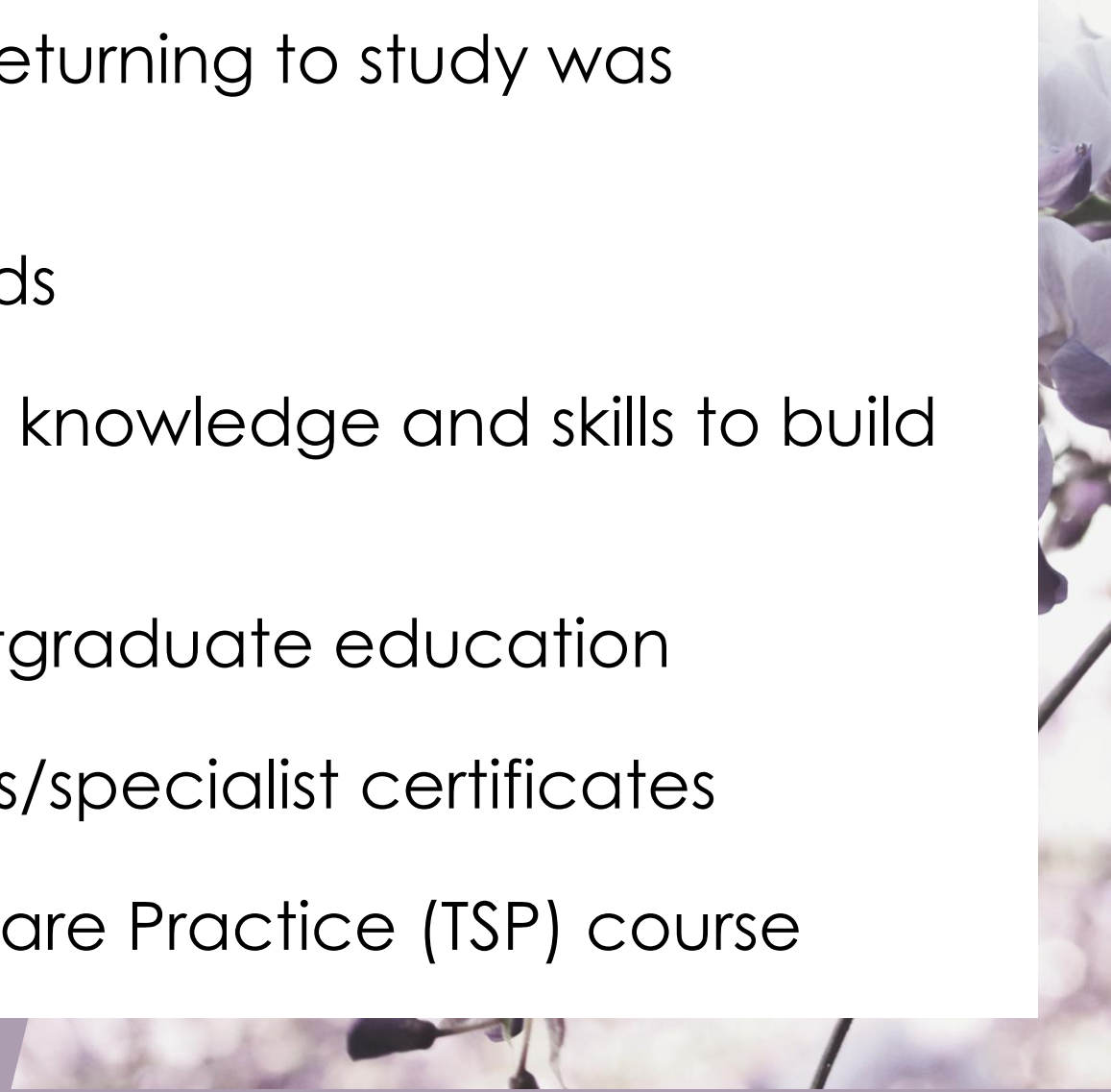
Skills Matrix 2018-25

Setting	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Community Palliative Care	122			12	3	23	1	171
Acute		62					1	79
Aged Care							7	7
Pre and post TSP			14	18	25	38	34	129
Allied Health			14				2	16
Total								402



Skills matrix – What next?

- Mid-career nurses reported that returning to study was challenging
- Competing work and life demands
- Nurses identified a need for more knowledge and skills to build confidence in practice
- Many/most had not pursued postgraduate education
- Exploration of hybrid short courses/specialist certificates
- Transition to Specialty Palliative Care Practice (TSP) course



Partnership in preparing Nurses for Palliative Care

The Transition to Specialty Palliative Care course is for RNs working in a community or an in-patient setting wanting to advance their palliative care knowledge. It is a supportive bridge for those who may wish to pursue post-graduate study but have not progressed the aspiration yet.

The pilot program was run over seven (7) sessions (each 6 weeks apart) in a face-to-face format. Mentoring and support for participants was provided from leaders across the palliative care sector. The face-to-face sessions were complimented by an accredited online component co-ordinated by the Australian College of Nursing (ACN). Completion of the course rewards one subject toward the Graduate Certificate of Professional Practice

Further study options are available for individuals who wish to advance their education with the goal for participants to complete a post graduate qualification following the initial program.

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Re-entry to study challenges

Participants told us that mid career nurses found the re-entry to study and complexity of work and life challenges led to their professional development being less of a priority. The attraction of the face to face learning teamed with online support and knowledge acquisition drew their interest to apply and complete the course. A quality improvement project was the main assessment task

Feedback to date

From a response rate of 79%, the participants agreed that the workshop information increased their knowledge and understanding of leadership in palliative care
Agree: 30%
Strongly agree 70%

Increased confidence and knowledge

The participants were asked if the content would support their current practice to improve
Agree 36%
Strongly agree 74%

Palliative Care South East Ltd

Ms Anny Byne Manager Gippsland Regional Palliative Care Consortium
Ms Carol Barbeler Palliative Aged Care and Disability Resource Nurse & MND Shared Care Worker (Gippsland) Gippsland Region Palliative Care Consortium
Adjunct Associate Professor Kelly Rogerson CEO Palliative Care South East, partnered to host and deliver each session with highly skilled external presenters from the sector.

Developing capability across the region

- 14 participants from across SE Melbourne and through to East Gippsland undertook the pilot to transition they came from acute, in-patient, community and regional palliative settings
- Scholarships were provided to complete the course
- Health services confirmed their support with the provision of study days
- Each session was evaluated
- Access to online learning, mentoring and regular leadership development sessions were included

SMRPCC

The pilot was supported with funding from the Southern Metropolitan Region Palliative Care Consortium

Australian College of Nursing

The content of the on-site course was supplemented by an online learning portal administered by the ACN. Academic Council authorised the content at an AQF 8 level, which allows recognition of prior learning for graduate certificate and diploma courses.

Want more information?

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Gippsland Pre and Post TSP			2	4	3	14	11	**34**
Allied Health			14				2	**16**
Total								**402**

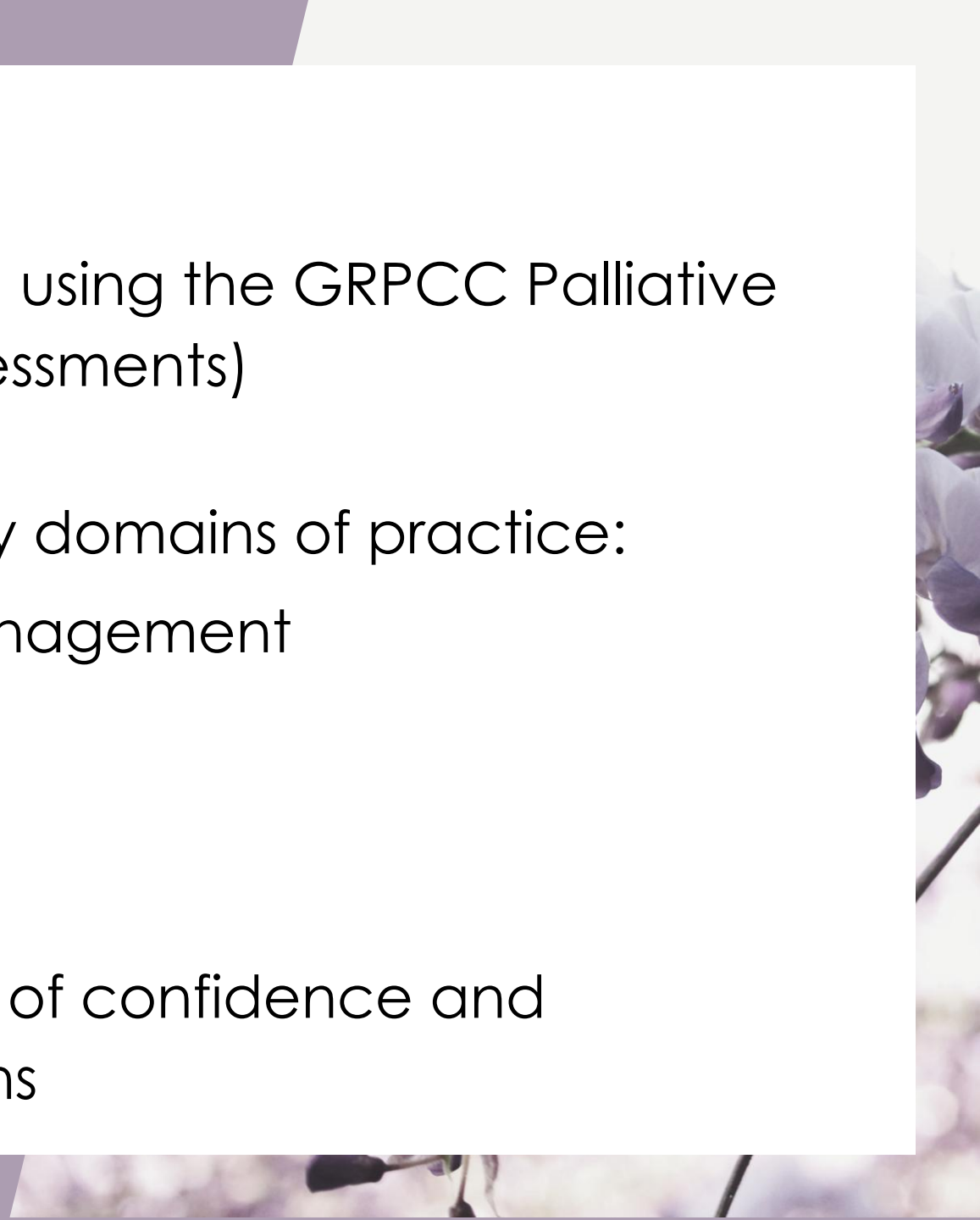
How we compared data

Self-rated responses were analysed using the GRPCC Palliative Care Skills Matrix (pre and post assessments)

Results were grouped into three key domains of practice:

- Assessment and symptom management
- Care of the dying person
- Communication

This approach highlighted patterns of confidence and development needs across domains



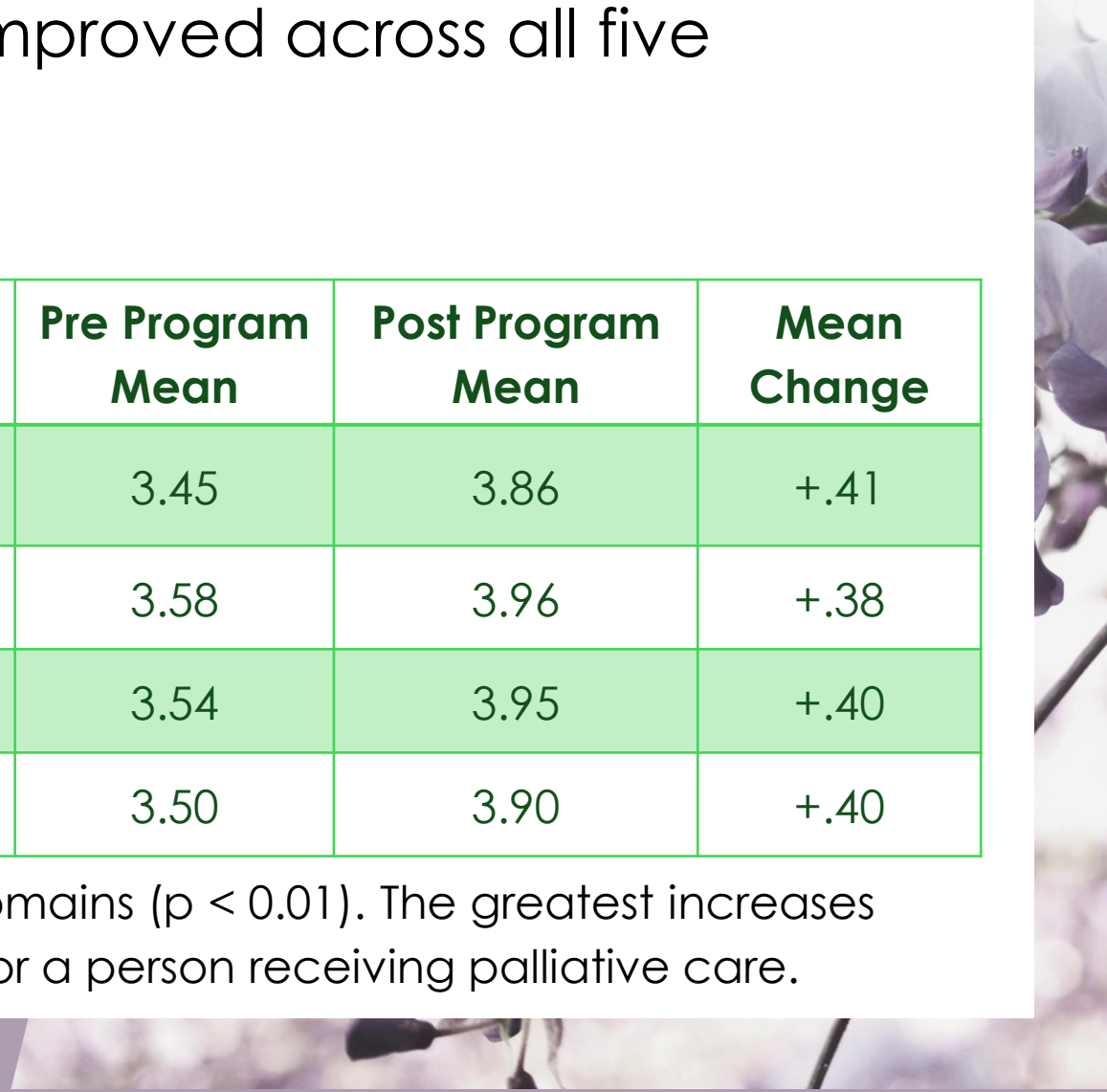
What we found (Gippsland nurses)

Overall self-reported confidence improved across all five domains (Table 1).

Table 1. Mean Confidence Scores (n = 34)

Domain	Pre Program Mean	Post Program Mean	Mean Change
Assessment and Symptom Management for a person receiving palliative care	3.45	3.86	+.41
Care of the Dying Person	3.58	3.96	+.38
Communication	3.54	3.95	+.40
Overall Average	3.50	3.90	+.40

Improvements were statistically significant across all domains ($p < 0.01$). The greatest increases occurred in Assessment and Symptom Management for a person receiving palliative care.



What does this mean?

- TSP Program and Skills Matrix increased confidence across all practice domains
- Greatest gains in assessment, symptom management and communication
- These areas are known learning priorities in palliative care (Aoun et al., 2017)
- Confidence is essential for effective patient and family care

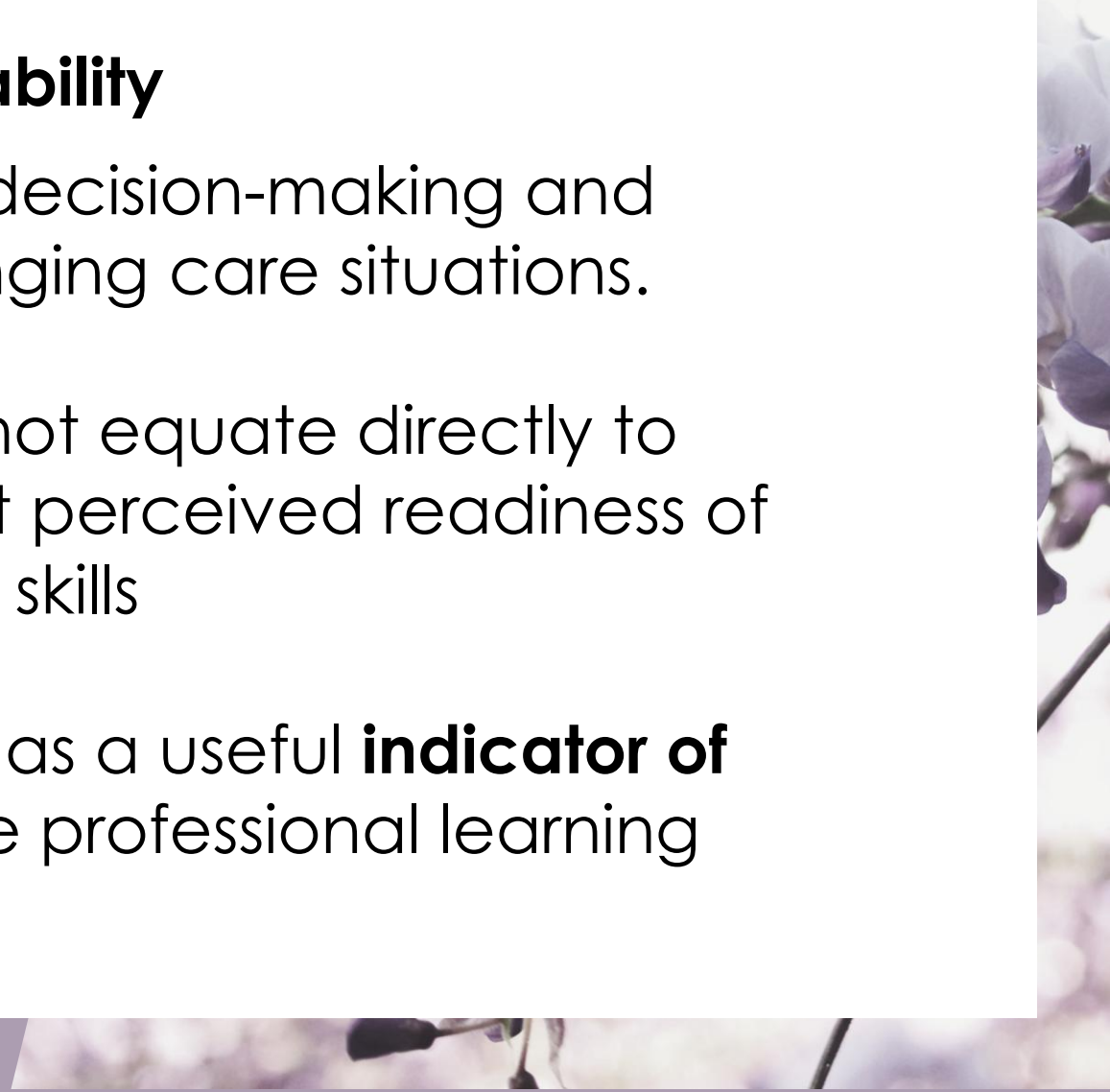
Translating into practice

Confidence as a foundation for capability

- Confidence influences clinical decision-making and willingness to engage in challenging care situations.

- Self-reported confidence may not equate directly to competence, but it does reflect perceived readiness of nurses to apply knowledge and skills

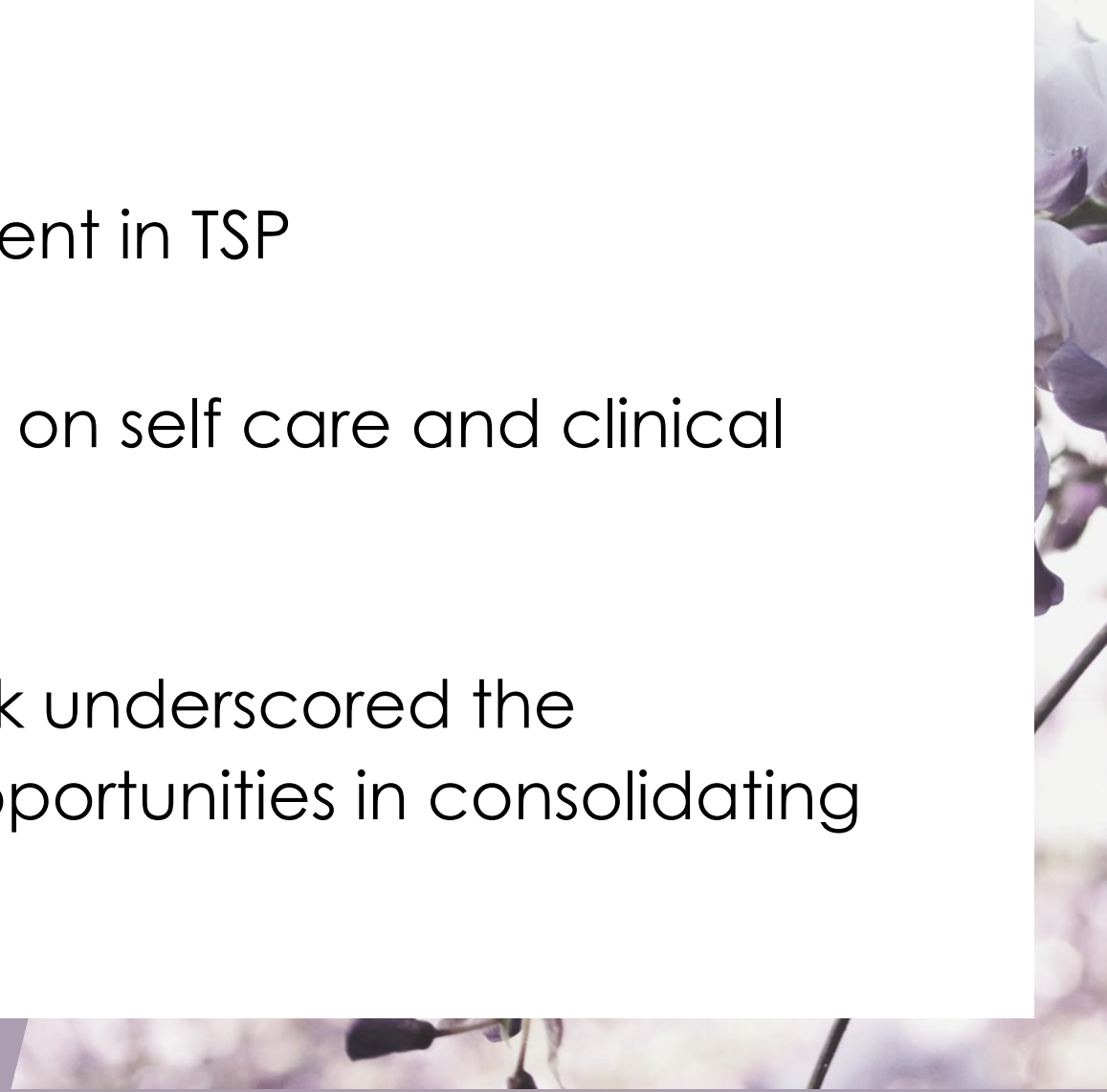
- The Skills Matrix therefore serves as a useful **indicator of developing capability** within the professional learning framework



Translating into practice

Reflective Learning and Mentorship

- Important and effective component in TSP
- The skills matrix includes questions on self care and clinical supervision
- Participants' qualitative feedback underscored the importance of these reflective opportunities in consolidating confidence.



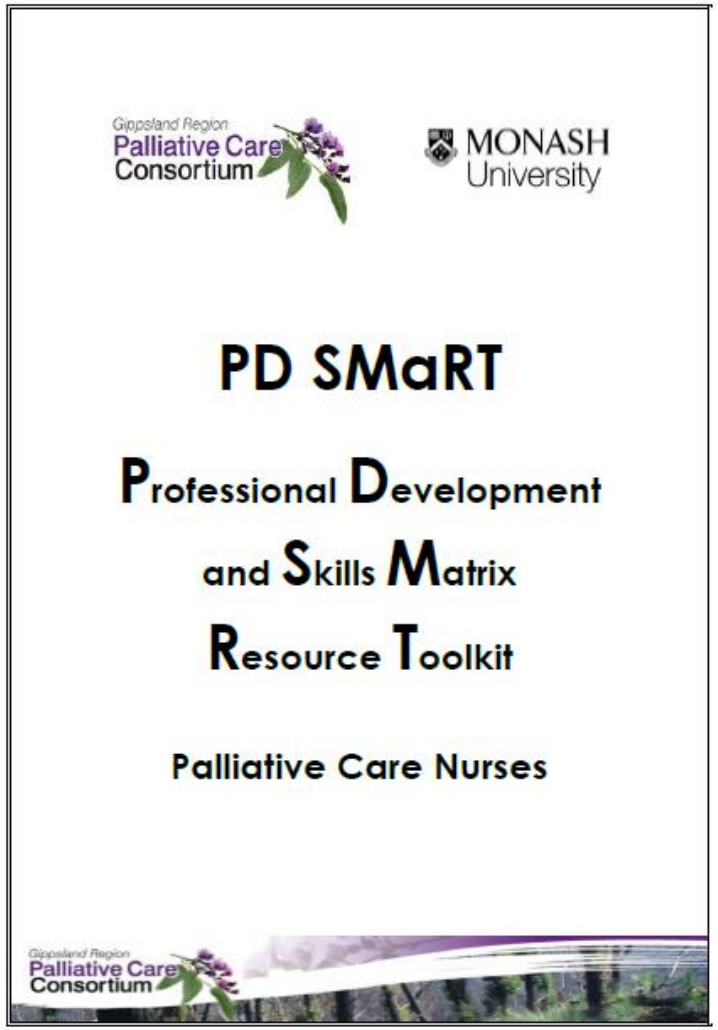
What they said

“I’ve learned to be proactive in symptom management and confident in escalating complex cases.”

“The program gave me the language and confidence to have difficult but important conversations with families.”

“I now understand the value of teamwork in providing holistic care.”

Palliative Care Skills Matrix



www.grpcc.com.au/health-professionals/resources/quality-improvement-projects

References and resources

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