

# Evaluation of the “Enhancing the role of the Nutrition Assistant at Dandenong Hospital” Project

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Background: Dietitians at Dandenong Hospital indicated that improved service efficiency and cost saving could be achieved if the Nutrition Assistant (NA) provided “basic” dietary education. Method: The focus of the project was on the development of clear NA referral pathways, learning packages and competency assessments for basic nutrition education topics including high-energy high -protein diets; nutrition post 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> degree tears; nutrition post jaw surgery; and nutrition for diverticular disease. Dietitian, NA and patient satisfaction, cost savings and service efficiency was evaluated. Results: Over an 11 month period the NA educated 172 patients and spent approximately 86 hours performing these educations under the direction of the Dietitian at a cost of \$2266. This equates to a \$1340 cost saving when compared to Dietitian (G2Y4) undertaking these educations. 67% of Dietitians surveyed felt it had “significant” impact on efficiency (i.e. time saving) whilst 33% indicated it had “somewhat” impact. High overall NA job satisfaction, attributed to new training opportunities and challenging/stimulating work was revealed. 34 patients were surveyed post NA education, 100% felt the information was easy to understand, adequate and questions were answered appropriately. Discussion: It is evident that the enhanced NA role has had a positive impact on time efficiency for Dietetic staff and NA job satisfaction, yet maintaining an effective education service and outcomes for patients. Utilisation of a NA or Allied Health Assistant in extended roles has potential cost savings, which is a relevant consideration in the current fiscal healthcare climate. However, such a change must be supported with careful planning, communication, training and competency assessment, and be evaluated stringently.

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