

A day in the life of an Interdisciplinary Allied Health Assistant

Rosie Antypas¹, Dr Lisa O'Brien², Jacqui Salway³

1 Rosie Antypas: Occupational Therapy Department Alfred Hospital, 55 Commercial Road Melbourne, Vic, 3004, r.antypas@alfred.org.au

2 Lisa O'Brien: Occupational Therapy Department Alfred Hospital, 55 Commercial Road Melbourne, Vic, 3004.

3 Jacqui Salway: Research and Quality Caulfield Hospital, 260 Kooyong Road Caulfield, Vic, 3162.

Background:

Allied Health Assistants (AHAs) have traditionally been aligned with one allied health discipline. There are, however, great benefits to patient care from having AHA's work across disciplinary boundaries, especially for complex patients who require multidisciplinary interventions. Furthermore, such diversity in provision of treatment and therapy can extend an AHA's skill set, allowing for greater job satisfaction, staff retention and potential career development of the AHA workforce.

Method:

Alfred Heath, a major tertiary hospital with State-wide speciality units in trauma and burns, employs 69 AHA's of whom 21 work across 2 or more disciplines. A senior AHA, funded by the Victorian Adult Burns Service (VABS) has worked on the unit since 2010 to assist with the provision of therapy services to its patients.

This presentation describes a typical workday in the VABS for the senior AHA. Therapy programs conducted by the AHA under supervision from occupational therapy and speech pathology include scar massage, oro-facial exercises, engagement in meaningful tasks such as self-care, cognitive activities, prevention of contractures by joint ranging, and assisting with orthosis fabrication. This represents an opportunity for AHA's to work in an advanced scope of practice role.

Discussion/Outcomes:

The benefits of having the same AHA provide cross-disciplinary care will be discussed using a burns case study with illustrations of typical interventions.

Conclusion:

AHA's operating across disciplines provide clear benefits to patient engagement in therapy as well as continuity of care. The use of AHA's allows more intensive therapy than could be provided by an Allied Health Professional working alone with this caseload. This is of particular importance in specialist units, and may lead to enhanced workforce skills and broader scope of practice.