

Defining Allied Health: through multi-level engagement

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Background

Common conventions for defining allied health are usually exclusive; referring to healthcare professionals who are not doctors or nurses. While this is a useful management tool that supports single points of contact and accountability, it does not describe positively what allied health professionals (AHPs) do. This may also encourage staff who are unfamiliar with unique professionals to make generalisations across all AHPs. Limited practical work has been done to define either unique professional contributions, or common skills of allied health staff. A window of opportunity presented for the inaugural Professor of Allied Health in a new tertiary hospital and health care service to define allied health through multi-level engagement.

Method

A range of interactive and engagement strategies for and beyond allied health staff were launched during the first 100 work days of this inaugural role; including a whole of health service competition, a patient experience video, an executive blog and interactive interprofessional facilitation exercises.

Results

38 staff from across the health service responded to the competition to describe “What is Allied Health”.

While one winner was chosen by a group of non-allied health executives and several descriptions were highly commended, allied health staff were challenged to create a combination phrase. A separate thematic analysis of all responses generated useful insights.

In comparison, two projects discriminated core professional contributions. A young patient who suffered a significant neurological injury was supported to describe her experience of different allied health therapies. Allied health leadership teams were facilitated to describe each other’s contributions and therefore refine their own unique roles in key teams.

Discussion

A summary of the observable benefits of defining how allied health professionals are similar and uniquely different will be offered via case studies and qualitative interviews, as evidence of the impact of this initiative.

Theme: Allied Health Marketing and Profile