

Investing in our staff

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Background: Professional practice development is a topical issue in healthcare and an organisational priority at Austin Health is ‘An excellent place to work and learn’.

Method: In 2007 our staff support and development programs were evaluated via staff survey and focus groups. The findings informed creation of a standardised orientation program, a template for clinical guidelines, and a framework for practical skill development, called ‘Practice Development Program’ (PDP). PDPs were designed to enable reflective practice and peer review, and were developed in 21 areas including clinical specialties, new graduate and grade 1 rotation programs, student supervision and food service. Dietitians completing PDPs record individual learning goals, complete a literature review, attend tutorials with staff from other disciplines and complete defined tasks supervised by a support clinician.

Results and Discussion: Thirty-three staff members have completed PDPs. To build on this framework professional supervision was introduced, clinical teams were rearranged and the continuing education program was reviewed. Despite 79% of staff reporting their learning needs and goals were met, it remained unclear whether knowledge and skills addressed in these programs were being applied and integrated into work performance. The ‘Learning Transfer System’ inventory was used to assess this. More than 80% of responses were positive for questions about organisational opportunities, goal selection and engagement. However some issues with learning climate were identified including perceived lack of time and rewards for taking part in learning and development, lack of support for study and education outside of work, lack of training in advanced skills and a lack of useful feedback to improve skills. Focus groups were held to explore these issues and programs were modified to help close these gaps.

Conclusion: Our teaching and training framework is aligned, standardised, targeted and relevant and supports the integration of knowledge, skills and professional behaviours into practice.