

# Preventing pitfalls of service planning through early engagement of allied health

**Julianne Donnelly<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Raffell<sup>2</sup>**

1 Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Metro South Hospital and Health Service, 199 Ipswich Rd Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102, julianne.donnelly@health.qld.gov.au

2 Speech Pathology, Casuarina Lodge, Metro South Hospital and Health Service, 48 New Lindum Rd Wynnum West, QLD, 4178, sarah.raffell@health.qld.gov.au

Health care systems have policies, procedures and standards to ensure consumers receive quality services that are safe and based on evidence or best practice.

As a result of infrastructure change, one Queensland Health facility sought to engage contract foodservice providers to meet their catering needs. During the planning and consultation phase there was no engagement of a dietitian and minimal speech pathology input.

Contract caterers subsequently began operation in September 2013. It was quickly identified that aspects of their service did not meet Queensland Health standards.

Urgent meetings were arranged between key stakeholders. Dietetics advocated for increased hours to analyse the current foodservice system against relevant documents including the Health Service Directive: Food and Nutrition Safety, State Nutrition Standards and National Texture Modified Food and Fluid Standards. The aim was to adopt a solution focussed approach to address the gaps.

The review revealed concerns for patient safety which were escalated to the district risk register. Management were responsive and regular meetings were held to address identified and emerging issues. Eighteen months on, some concerns are still being worked through.

The review highlighted the pitfalls of not engaging relevant allied health professionals in the planning phase of a major change to service delivery. The consequences of inadequate consultation became apparent as the new system negatively impacted on consumers, their families, staff and the organisation.

When allied health are not invited to the planning table, the value of specialist knowledge is lost. So what can be done differently to ensure patient safety and valuable resources are not compromised when system changes are implemented?

Allied Health need to be proactive not reactive. The challenge is to position influential leaders with vision to scan the local and broader environment for opportunities to actively advocate for allied health to be front and centre in service planning.