

Austin Health Physiotherapy Workforce Redesign

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Background: The Austin Health Physiotherapy Department identified several deficiencies in the traditional model of acute physiotherapy service delivery. In April 2014 funding was secured from the Workforce Branch of the Department of Health to conduct a workforce redesign project.

Method: A new model of acute physiotherapy care based on best available evidence was developed and the workforce was divided into three new streams of care: Acute and Deteriorating, Early Rehabilitation and Transition and Maintenance. To ensure equitable access to services a hospital wide prioritisation system was developed. The project was overseen by a Physiotherapy Department Steering Committee and a Hospital Governance Committee which included key stakeholders. Evaluation included pre-post measurement of clinical activity, patient outcomes and organisational access data for the same time period from the previous year.

Results; The workforce model was successfully implemented within the project time frame. Since implementation, there has been increased allocation of resources to patients most in need of treatment; no time spent seeing patients who receive little benefit from treatment; no waitlist of patients for a sub-acute bed; a reduction in the sub-acute length of stay by 7% (estimated additional capacity of 1420 subacute bed days); 23% reduction in the number of acute bed days for patients in hospital for between 14-28 days (estimated additional capacity of 11,385 days per annum). Consumer interviews indicated patients were more satisfied with their physiotherapy treatment in the new model and staff focus groups were overwhelmingly positive.

Discussion The new workforce model allows the Physiotherapy Department to provide a more flexible and responsive service across the hospital. Staff engagement with the change process was key to the success of the new model. The principles underlying the new model and the prioritisation system can be applied to other allied health departments and health services.