

# Advantages and challenges of providing weekend allied health services on acute medical and surgical wards: the managers' perspective

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## Background

Health services face competing demands to provide high quality care, seven day per week, while also minimising the costs of service delivery. Providing the same amount of care on weekends as during the week is problematic. Some staff are reluctant to work on weekends and industrial agreements in different countries dictate that rates of pay are higher for work done on weekends.

Monash Health spent more than \$1million on weekend allied health (AH) services in 2012-3 despite a lack of evidence showing these services on acute medical and surgical wards result in better patient outcomes. There may also be unanticipated problems and inefficiencies in providing these services, such as staff training, recruitment, retention and supervision.

## Methods

We interviewed AH managers and senior clinicians at two health services who provide weekend services and asked what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of providing such a service. Interviews were analysed using a qualitative framework approach.

## Results

Twenty-two AH managers and senior clinicians participated in this study. Weekend AH services were seen as adding value to the health service by providing timely service to those patients in need of specialist AH on the weekend. Managers perceived the services could reduce patient length of stay and adverse incident rates, and improve quality of care.

Participants reported a number of challenges in providing services on the weekend. These included the challenge of providing an efficient service at times when other services are not being available and the time taken to train weekend staff.

## Discussion

The cost of providing weekend AH services is significant, given the higher rates of pay, hidden costs of managing the service and the inherent inefficiencies providing care on the weekends. Research is required to ascertain the true value of these services and question if the current resource allocation delivers return on investment.