

## Evaluation of the “Enhancing the role of the Nutrition Assistant at Dandenong Hospital” Project

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### Background

An opportunity arose at Dandenong Hospital (DH) to develop new responsibilities for the Nutrition Assistant (NA). Dietitians indicated that improved service efficiency and cost savings could be achieved if the NA provided dietary education to patients identified as a discharge priority.

As hospital patient length of stay reduces, utilising a NA to educate patients can support improvement of patient discharge rates, enable Dietitians to service a greater number of high priority patients, and participate in quality/research activities to improve patient care and outcomes.

To ensure working within their scope of practice, the project focused on development of clear NA referral and clinical pathways, and learning packages including competency assessments for basic nutrition education topics including high energy protein diets; nutrition post 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> degree tears; nutrition post jaw surgery; and nutrition for diverticular disease.

### Aim

To evaluate the impact of the NA undertaking a new education role on Dietitian efficiency, and Dietitian, NA and patient satisfaction.

### Method

Development of a NA education referral pathway was undertaken with careful consideration to ensure that referrals remained within the positional scope of practice recommendations. Learning modules and NA observation of Dietitian educations was utilised as training methods. Competency packages for each education module were developed following benchmarking and literature review.

Competency was assessed using quizzes to assess knowledge and Dietitian observation of the NA to assess education skills.

After a period of implementation, patients, Dietitians and the NA were surveyed to ascertain level of satisfaction with the NA undertaking these responsibilities.

Data was also collected to determine Dietitians time and cost saving, figures calculated on the salary rate of an NA and a grade 2 level 4 Dietitian.

### Results

Over an 11 month period the NA saw 172 patients and spent approximately 86 hours performing nutrition educations.

Eighty six hours of services equates to \$2266 of a G2Yr4 dietetic salary, and offers a cost saving of approximately \$1340 when these services are provided by an NA.

Dietitians were surveyed in relation to the impact on efficiency (i.e. time saving) with the NA performing basic educations; 67% felt it had significant impact and 33% indicated it had “somewhat” impact.

The completed NA job satisfaction survey indicated high overall satisfaction, attributed by new training opportunities and challenging/stimulating work being offered as part of the position. The NA identified further opportunities to extend the role and enhance job satisfaction which could include monitoring of long stay patients, data collection for quality projects, basic nutrition assessment or completing Subjective Global Assessments.

Of the 34 patients surveyed post NA education 100% felt the information was easy to understand, adequate and questions were answered adequately. 70% felt the information was “extremely” useful and 30% felt the information was “fairly” useful.

### Conclusion

It is evident that the new NA role at Dandenong Hospital has had a positive impact on time efficiency for Dietitians and enhancement of NA job satisfaction, yet maintained effective education service and outcomes for patients. Utilisation of Allied Health Assistants or NA’s in extended roles also has significant potential cost savings, which is a relevant consideration in the current fiscal environment. However this change should be supported by careful planning, communication, training and competency assessment, and be evaluated stringently.