



The effectiveness of a Volunteer Meal Assistance Program to improve the nutritional intake of aged care patients in hospital

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Background

The **Volunteer Meal Assistance Program (VMAP)** was developed to address inadequate provision of assistance to patients at meal times across Western Health (WH). In 2013 a WH study found 42% of patients requiring assistance at meal times and only half of these patients received help. In 2015 VMAP was rolled out to the aged care wards at Williamstown Hospital.

VMAP

Trained volunteers provide lunch time assistance with meal set-up, opening packages and social interaction and encouragement for patients.



Methods

- Quality approval by WH ethics committee.
- Lunch time tray wastage audits were collected for 2 consecutive days at baseline and 3 months post implementation of VMAP, using a validated visual plate wastage scoring method.
- Patients, staff and volunteers were invited to complete the satisfaction questionnaire at 3 month post implementation.

Results

To date, volunteers have provided over 600 occasions of meal assistance to patients.

Staff, volunteer and patient satisfaction

- Staff, volunteers and patients reported an improved social environment on the ward.
- 88% of staff (n=18) found the program beneficial and reported increased time for other tasks.
- The majority of volunteers felt they were contributing as part of the team in helping improve patients' meal time experience.

"I have enjoyed my experience with VMAP. It took some practice but I now feel confident in approaching the patients and offering assistance."

Volunteer

- 64% of patients socially interacted with the volunteers and the majority enjoyed this.

"I greatly appreciate the help, as my family generally work during the day. I also enjoy the chat."

Patient

Assistance provided at lunch time increased significantly

- 70% of patients (n=23) reported requiring assistance and 94% of these received it.

Energy and protein intake pre and post implementation was not statistically significant (p=0.14, p=0.58)

- Larger and more homogenous sample group will be required for repeat analysis.

Future direction

- Larger scale impact study on VMAP's effect on patients' nutritional intake.
- Ongoing rollout of VMAP across WH.
- Ongoing volunteer recruitment and retention for VMAP.

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