

160: BRIDGING THE GAP IN THE CHALLENGE OF NURSING RECRUITMENT & RETENTION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: AN AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

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Objective:

To improve nursing recruitment and retention in a major health service.

Method:

Nursing recruitment and retention are significant issues confronting health services around the world today. By the year 2010, the United States predicts a shortage of 1.2 million Registered Nurses. In addition, one of the prevailing myths in our professional community today is the notion that "anyone can work in aged care". Along the way, this has contributed to an image problem which is perceived to have had a significant (negative) impact on the recruitment of nurses into the disciplines of aged care, rehabilitation and nursing home care.

Caulfield General Medical Centre (CGMC) is a large service provider with over 360 beds in Victoria, Australia. It is part of Bayside Health, a major metropolitan health service with primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary level services. In January 2001, the organisation was using high levels of casual (nurse bank and external agency) nursing staff (between 50 to 60 EFT per month) exacerbated by a vacancy rate of just under 70 EFT. A new service was being planned for July 2001 and with a small monthly attrition rate, there was a projected vacancy rate of just over 130 EFT during the next twelve month period. A vision for nursing recruitment was required.

During the next twelve months, the organisation turned its attention to nursing recruitment and retention and put many basic mechanisms and processes in place to maximise its participation in the prospective employment market. These included innovative approaches to capturing organisational interest, new options for work patterns, new approaches in the selection of staff and improved use of data gathering and analysis. In addition, some innovative programs have been implemented along with the implementation of a formal clinical nursing school partnership with a local university. To date the strategy has paid dividends beyond expectations.

Results:

Since January 2001, the nursing service at CGMC has:

- opened 67 additional beds;
- employed over 220 new nursing staff (part time, full time and casual);
- reduced vacancies by 80%;
- reduced external agency nursing use by 70%;
- saved a total recurrent expenditure in excess of \$1.2m per annum.

Conclusion:

Whilst many organisations will focus on "quick fix" solutions such as overseas recruitment or financial incentives for joining staff, there is so much that can be done locally in a very low cost, efficient and effective manner. This presentation on a major quality improvement initiative will summarise the journey travelled from January 2001 until the present time. Much of the success can be attributed to understanding the basic needs of potential staff and developing a strategy to maintain the nursing workforce beyond 2001.