

# A Success Story...

## BUILDING THE PRACTICE TEAM: A Holistic Approach

Team Building

### Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic - SA

**T**he Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic acknowledged that their participation in the NPCC would fail if they did not address the issues of their current dysfunctional team. Previous reconciliation meetings had been unsuccessful with resolving issues of bullying, sabotage, lack of leadership, and individuals not voicing their opinions for fear of retribution.

The practice identified the need to demonstrate the value of staff; change its culture and behaviour; and build a model that was more than work focussed. A model was implemented that recognised the importance of health and well-being, with a focus on the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of individuals. This practice has successfully implemented a number of strategies to improve the working environment, build the practice team and create a forum for open feedback.



### Context

**K**angaroo Island Medical Clinic is located on Kangaroo Island, 18kms from mainland South Australia. It is primarily a farming district with a population of 4,500, but also a favourite tourist destination with 160,000 visitors to the Island each year. There is one general practice on the Island with 4.5 FTE GPs. These practitioners are the only medical service on the Island and also provide clinical and emergency care at the hospital.

Since joining the NPCC the practice has employed 1.5 FTE practice nurses to supplement the service provided by the GPs. The practice has grown considerably over the past seven years from three GPs, four reception staff in 1999; to five GPs, three Practice Nurses, a Practice Manager and seven reception staff in 2006.

### The Situation

**T**he practice team had grown quickly, but with that had come a culture of hierarchy, bullying, knowledge holding and fault finding. While individuals went about completing their daily tasks, the practice was not a positive environment with staff feeling undervalued and not empowered to be part of decision making processes.

The decision to join the NPCC was seen as an opportunity to address the practice team issues, as cohesion was paramount to their future success in the program.

The practice was keen to implement a Wellness program amongst their patients with coronary heart disease but thought they would trial it amongst their own staff in the first instance to determine the effectiveness of this approach.

"It was anticipated that if the practice could bring the team together there would be less resistance to and environment of change management and quality improvement."

## The Change

**T**he Practice Manager and lead GP met to identify the issues to be tackled and the strategies to be adopted in the practice. It was decided that a number of strategies would be necessary to tackle the practice team issue, and the Wellness Clinic would follow.



*The Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic*

Staff attended a one day training session in which they were presented with information on the Courtesy System, the Open Feedback Model, the Dreyfus Model and the development of 'group norms' for the practice.

**The Courtesy System** tackled the difficult interpersonal issues that were evident in the practice. The way people interacted in the practice had to change and staff needed to feel valued. A number of behavioural norms were developed and included the requirement of everyone to speak politely, say please and thank you; use the person's name and acknowledge people upon arrival and departure from the work place.

The **Open Feedback System** was discussed and was to be used in conjunction with the courtesy system. Under this model feedback is seen as a gift. It is based upon fact rather than assumption, and creates an ethos of asking instead of assuming. In an open feedback model the feedback is direct to the individual and feedback is the responsibility of everyone in the workplace, not just management. It makes everyone responsible for the behaviour that will or will not be tolerated. It empowers every individual to take responsibility for acceptable behaviour.

**The Dreyfus Model** explained that despite individual skills or qualifications any person undertaking a particular role for the first time will be a novice, and will in fact take five years to become an expert. Novices are rule governed, while experts conduct tasks intuitively. This model acknowledged that all individuals are at different levels for different tasks, and the expert is not the best teacher of a novice because they are not rule governed.

This was important to recognise as some staff were assumed to have a certain degree of knowledge because of where they had worked previously or their qualification, when in fact they were a novice because they had not applied those skills in the general practice environment. In addition staff did not realise how good they were at certain tasks (experts), and this allowed them to have more tolerance and understanding of the difficulty another individual may have learning a new task.

At each subsequent staff meeting the models were revisited and discussed. The practice also included some information relevant to the well-being of their staff but not work related, for example a visit by a dietician to discuss label reading; while stress management ideas were presented by a worker from local mental health team.

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### The Change cont...

As the team began to mature the Wellness Program was introduced. Each staff member was presented with their Wellness Gift Bag which included: a pedometer; the CSIRO diet book; list of "100 books to read before you die"; a book voucher; and a voucher to attend a medical appointment with their doctor of choice. Staff were also given 10 minutes of paid time every day to go for a walk.

In addition the practice provided morning tea every day for all staff, including healthy food options, rather than cake and biscuits. These changes encouraged all staff to take a break from their workspace and included some social time.

It was anticipated that if the practice could bring the team together there would be less resistance to an environment of change management and quality improvement.

### The Outcome



*The practice team at Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic*

**T**his practice is very proud of what it has achieved over the past 18 months. The previously dysfunctional team has been transformed into a workplace where individuals feel valued and diversity and skills are seen as an opportunity rather than a threat.

The behavioural norms developed by the staff have been implemented successfully, as have the Courtesy System, the Dreyfus Model and the Open Feedback model. All allowing a forum for staff to discuss issues without fear of retribution.

The Wellness Program was welcomed by staff. A walking program was implemented with staff 'buddied' up with a co-worker who they did not work directly with. This allowed the opportunity to further foster relationships within the practice.

During 2006 some healthy competition was introduced with the practice dividing staff into two teams and the "Great KI Race" began. Each week the number of steps each team took (using their pedometers) was converted into total kilometres and their progress mapped on a large map of Kangaroo Island. The map was displayed on the wall in the waiting room for patients to observe. This particular event was a huge success with the practice hoping to extend the race in 2007 to involve a number of businesses or teams from the community, with results displayed weekly in the local paper.

Staff expanded this need to socialise and exercise, and entered a team in the Night Owls bowling competition over summer, and more recently some have joined the local gym and attend Pilates classes.

It was discovered that many of the books on the list of "100 books to die before you read" were owned by staff in the practice. Each person put their name against the books they owned and a book pool was developed with staff sharing the books amongst themselves. The book pool has been expanded and continues 18 months down the track.

The uptake of an annual medical check with the doctor of choice was harder to encourage staff to participate in. Early results however identified one staff member with diabetes and allowed others to develop personalised weight loss programs.

### The Outcome *continued...*

Over the year interpersonal relationships have improved. The courtesy system and group norms have been instrumental in maintaining this expectation, and are included in the orientation of new staff to the practice.

There has been a significant change in the way the staff solve problems. This was observed during a staff meeting when there was a discussion regarding money being short from the till on three occasions in one fortnight. It was encouraging to observe that the discussion revolved around what system could be implemented to reduce the chance of this occurring again, rather than laying blame with an individual.

The success this practice has achieved from participating in the NPCC is reflected in their results. While the success of their team building approach is hard to quantify there is no doubt that the workplace has improved significantly. The focus on team building reduced the resistance that may have resulted, had the clinical aims of the NPCC been attempted prior to addressing the larger issues relating to the practice team.

The Kangaroo Island Medical Centre now enjoys a culture of quality improvement and looks forward to tackling the issue of improving access, and further developing systems to support chronic disease management.

### Support Material

**T**o support these changes the Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic developed and utilised the following resources:

- A poster of practice team with the behavioural norms is on the wall in the toilet and in the administration area, to remind staff of their commitment
- Each staff member was presented with a well-being kit including: pedometer, CSIRO diet book, book voucher, list of 100 books to read before you die, and free medical appointment with the doctor of their choice
- Training provided to staff to discuss purpose and the implementation of the Open Feedback model, and the Dreyfus Model
- Information about the Dreyfus Model is based on the research of H. and S. Dreyfus. University of California, Berkeley, and the work of Patricia Benner
- Dr Paddi Lund, Building the Happiness Centred Business, Solutions Press. (The Courtesy System)

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