

Nurse-led quality improvement in primary care

For the first time the Australian Primary Care Collaboratives Program (APCC) is delivering three new specialised waves that focus on greater engagement of general practice nurses to lead quality improvement work in a new nurse led quality improvement program, the Practice Nurse Lead Program.

Build and maintain the team

The Practice Nurse Lead Wave and Practice Manager Lead Wave recently joined forces to host their first learning workshop. Facilitated by APCC Clinical Advisor Dr Andrew Knight, a key aspect of this workshop was to discuss the APCC Foundation Principle, *build and maintain the team*.

Over the years, experience has shown implementation of sustainable change is more successful when the whole team is engaged and participates in the improvement journey. Jenny Brandon, a General Practice Nurse and Practice Manager at Gracemere Medical Centre in Queensland, Implementation Lead for the Nurse Wave, and Brett McPherson, Practice Manager at Collins Street Medical Centre in Victoria, Implementation Lead for the Practice Manager Wave, generously shared their team building experience at the workshop.

Here is six of the best team building tips from Jenny, Brett and other APCC participants.

Engage the team

Effective teams have members who feel committed to agreed goals. Explain reasons behind what your organisation is doing and inform everyone about your progress. Team members will engage more with the process if they understand why it is important and can appreciate the anticipated benefits for patients and the practice or health service.

Get the whole team involved in developing and implementing ideas for change. Staff members will feel that their input is valued.

Identify your champion/s. You may not get everyone engaged at the start. Make small changes using the support of those who are on board. Celebrate and share success and good ideas and promote them across the team. You'll find that people will be drawn in by the success of others.

Create teams within teams

Not everyone needs to be involved in everything and it may be difficult to get everyone to attend whole of team meetings. Consider having 'micro-teams' working on various projects and feeding back to the broader team.

Share information

Effective teams communicate well. Good communication saves time, money and eliminates duplicated work. To enhance communication in your practice try email or intranet updates, a communication book and face to face meetings between the whole practice team or amongst micro-teams. Noticeboards have been used in many practices to post updates or display graphs so the team can share improvements, celebrate progress and the achievement of milestones.

Share your successes and your failures. Effective teams will regularly reflect on what they are doing. They will look at where they are and reflect on what's working and what's not. They will ask themselves; what should we do more of, what should we do less of or stop doing altogether, what have we achieved, and how does this compare to what we expected to achieve?

Sometimes having whole of team meetings can be difficult. Nurses, reception staff, and general practitioners can have their own team meetings and include a representative from other micro-teams to provide input and updates. Micro-teams can also post updates on the intranet, in the communication book, on the noticeboard or leave updates in the tea room. This approach provides opportunities for everyone in the team to keep informed of the work that's being done.

It's often the process not the people

Problems are usually with the process rather than the people. Practice managers and nurses can influence this, and that's why they become key to the change process and improving outcomes.

At Brett's practice, Collins Street Medical Centre, they focus on getting the process right. Testing things on a small scale first; reflecting, refining and adapting before rolling out for broader use.

Invest in your resources

Staff will need to allocate time to plan and undertake new tasks or initiatives. You may need to invest in additional wages, technology, or other resources to improve processes, efficiencies and patient outcomes in the medium to long term. Brett sees allocation of 'protected time' to staff as an investment in the practice's future.

The Chocolate Frog Strategy

Recognising your team's efforts and value to the organisation can produce great outcomes. Small acts of recognition, gratitude and celebration contribute significantly towards staff morale.

You won't believe what people will do for a chocolate frog... Try holding a competition and offer a small prize like a chocolate frog as a weekly incentive. Jenny's practice tried a number of different strategies to encourage staff to complete diabetic risk assessments (DRATs), without much success. What worked the best in the end? From a baseline of just one or two DRATs a week, a regular weekly prize of a chocolate frog generated an influx of more than 20 completed DRATs each week. It's been so successful they now take the same approach for other targets too, again with great success.

This is just a snapshot of the great ideas put forward by Andrew Knight, Jenny Brandon, Brett McPherson and other webinar attendees. You can view this webinar in full for free – contact editor@apna.asn.au to find out how.

Improvement Foundation

The Australian Primary Care Collaboratives Program supports general practices to improve clinical outcomes, help maintain good health for those with chronic and complex conditions, and improve access to Australian general practice by promoting a culture of quality improvement in primary health care. Find out more at www.apcc.org.au.

