

Dental Therapist Project



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Jan Curry



In 2007 Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) undertook a project in which Dental Therapists (DTs) provided direct restorative care to adults older than 25 years under the supervision of a Dentist.

At the time, A DT's scope of practice was limited to providing a range of treatments for adults no older than 25 years in consultation with a Dentist. The study investigated whether, with training, DTs could provide quality care to those above the age limitation.

This presentation outlines the experience of a consumer sitting on the project's Clinical Advisory Panel.



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The Project

The project was conducted at DHSV's Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne in partnership with the University of Melbourne's Melbourne Dental School.

- Clinical phase: January - February 2007
- Six monthly review phase: July - August 2007

Objectives

- To assess adult patient satisfaction with the services
- To assess Dental Therapist (DT) satisfaction
- To consider supplementary training requirements, and
- Make recommendations for the extension of DT scope of clinical practice to include adults older than 25 years of age.

Clinical Advisory Panel (CAP)

The CAP consisted of 12 members who:

- Oversaw the project's research methodology
- Developed project timelines, clinical assessment tools and evaluation tools
- Provided additional training and support for participating DTs
- Reviewed findings and feedback.

Ms Jan Curry agreed to sit as consumer representative on the CAP to advocate on behalf of the community.

Jan's Story



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Why be part of the Clinical Advisory Panel?

Jan volunteered to be part of the panel because of her personal experiences with public oral health services and her interest in raising the profile of Dental Therapists:

"My children were treated by Dental Therapists when they were young. I wanted to advocate on their behalf"

What was it like to sit on the panel?

Jan already had a good knowledge of the organisation from her role on the DHSV Community Advisory Committee, which she says helped in her role on the panel.

She says:

- She felt accepted and respected as a member of the panel.
- There was always an explanation to questions when she asked them.
- It helps to have a passion for the topic.
- The DT's patient communication skills were excellent.
- If the project is successful, DTs will have better career opportunities, but more importantly, there will be an immediate benefit to consumers with more clinicians able to treat them.

"I encourage anyone to consider participating in these types of projects"

How can we be more mindful of consumer participants?

- Create a glossary of terms to help with technical language.
- Provide an orientation to the project and a tour of the area.





Effective Consumer Participation



Dr Hanny Calache, chair of the Clinical Advisory Panel, observed that Jan's participation made the panel successful. She:

- Was open to the idea that services could be provided in a different way
- Displayed a genuine interest in the success of the project, and in ways to improve the public oral health system generally
- Was not intimidated by a large group of health professionals
- Contributed to questions seeking consumer feedback
- Expressed an interest in improving the profile of oral health in the wider community.

"Active consumer participations leads to more accessible and effective health services"

- Consumer Focus Collaboration, 2001

Suggestions for involving consumers

- Create a collaborative environment: consumers are most engaged where a two-way partnership exists with the organisation.
- Make the experience welcoming: think about ways to introduce technical information and reduce barriers to open discussion.
- Provide feedback on outcomes: effective consultation is more than just listening.

Project Results



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Feedback

Of the 80 patients who participated in the six month review:

- 76.25% definitely had no problems with their therapists restored teeth
- 90% said they would return for DT treatment
- 87.5% said that they would recommend DT treatment to other adults

Supporting Dentists commented that:

- Interaction between DTs and patients was excellent across all age groups
- DTs displayed a high level of professionalism
- Care provided by DTs was of a similar standard to that of newly graduated Dentists



Outcomes

- In January 2009, the Dental Practice Board of Victoria (DPBV) removed the age limitation for DTs, allowing them to treat patients over the age of 25.
- DHSV is developing a educational program for DTs. A pilot of the program will be led by DHSV and will draw on expertise from The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University.

If you would like to know more about community participation at
Dental Health Services Victoria, email cac@dhsv.org.au.