



Chief Health Professions Office

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From the Chief Health Professions Officer

Hello everyone

During October, I was on a brief hiatus to the United States to spend some time with my family. My thanks to Karen Lennon who acted in this position in my absence and to Grace Carroll who took on the manager's role for Karen. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, I will try to cover the activities of the Office from July 2008 to September 2008. The Office was very busy with the continued work on our various projects during my absence in October.

Allied Health and Health Science Professionals' Issues

July

I had the opportunity to meet with the Social Workers Administrators Group in July to discuss the role of the Office as well as to learn of concerns for social workers within the area health services. One concern discussed was the problems related to recruitment of overseas trained social workers as often the training and experience of social workers in other countries is not equivalent to that of social workers in Western Australia. A flow on from that meeting was a meeting I had with Dr Steve Patchett, Executive Director, Mental Health Division to discuss some particular issues related to recruitment of social workers in mental health.

The Medical Engineering and Physics Department of Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) invited me to lunch and to tour their facility. It was very impressive to see the type of work being done - from how plates are designed and made for mending pelvic bones to how computer programs are being developed through collaboration between speech pathology and medical engineering to assist persons with quadriplegic paralysis to have more control over their environment. The staff raised a number of issues relating to concerns about the impact of the move to Fiona Stanley Hospital, how jobs are classified as well as recruitment issues.



I also met with representatives from the Clinical Psychologists Reference Group (CPRG) to discuss an ongoing concern about difficulties procuring appropriate rooms in which to provide psychological services. The issue revolves around the importance of the physical environment on the effectiveness of services and while there is a specific concern for clinical psychologists, it is an issue that has relevance to other allied health clinicians. The CPRG has agreed to partner with the Office to complete a project looking at the needs of therapeutic environments for effective services to consumers. This is a critical issue for hospitals and community clinics in how they design their buildings to meet the therapeutic needs of the services being provided.

The Metropolitan Allied Health Council (MAHC) invited me to their meeting in July. This was a good occasion to discuss the relationship of MAHC to the Office as well as to the allied health councils of the area health services. We agreed that it would be timely to review these relationships and a governance forum is planned in November to continue to examine of these relationships should develop.

The role of the medical physicist is one of the many valuable health science positions that receive little recognition. However, without medical physicists, the availability of treatments utilising nuclear elements would be almost non-existent. There is currently a serious risk to the delivery of these treatments due to the difficulty in recruiting medical physicists to our hospitals. One reason for this difficulty in recruiting is that there are no university programs in medical physics in Western Australia. Sean Geohagen, Senior Medical Physicist from RPH, met with me to discuss these concerns and the proposal that had been developed a few years ago for a medical physic course at University of Western Australia (UWA). The Office will continue to work with Sean and his colleagues around this issue.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Murray Patterson, Chief Pharmacist. We discussed the relationship between his role and this Office as well as the future of the Poisons Act and extended scope of practice for pharmacists.

August

In August, the Office held a meeting with Kendra Bell, Jemma Baston, Kathryn Devereaux, Elizabeth Harris, Roslyn Jones, Christina Ladyman, Bronwyn Middleton and Sue Gough to discuss the work they were doing in the development and use of allied health assistants, and how the Office can support these efforts. The Office is currently reviewing the role and use of assistants in the Department. Health reform and workforce issues have placed the use of assistants on the national workforce agenda and it is encouraging to learn that Western Australia is already engaged in developing this important workforce.

I also met with representatives from the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) to discuss national registration as well as extended scope of practice and role of physiotherapy assistants. The APA has already begun a number of projects utilising physiotherapy assistants and also in developing the extended scope of practice for physiotherapists.

September

Concerns about recruitment difficulties for clinical perfusionists were raised by Dr Leigh Coombs, Head of Department, Anaesthesia, RPH. I met with Leigh and some of his staff to look at what some of the barriers to recruitment were. What was immediately identified was the essential criterion of being certified by the Australasian Board of Cardio-vascular Perfusion (ABCVP) or equivalent. There is presently a shortage of certified clinical perfusionists and trainees completing the Australasian Diploma of Perfusion within Australia.



The ABCVP does not have a process for evaluating the equivalence of training done overseas; thus, this potential workforce supply is not eligible for employment with hospitals in Western Australia. The Office, assisted by staff in the Department of Anaesthesia at RPH have been looking at ways that this issue can be resolved so that we can be more effective in recruiting clinical perfusionists.

Clinical perfusionists assemble and operate the Cardiopulmonary bypass machine and other Cardiopulmonary equipment, in liaison with medical staff, in the theatre and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) environment. They are also responsible, in conjunction with the Anaesthetists, for the administration of chemical cardioplegia.

The Office has been approached by the Rotary Clubs of Mt Lawley and West Perth about collaborating on an Allied Health Professional Award to be given annually. This is a very exciting development and we hope to be able to give the inaugural award in 2009.

Extended scope and advanced scope of practice are now very much an integral part of the national health reform movement. However, there really had not been a discussion of these issues within the allied health professions within the health services. In order to obtain a clearer picture of how these initiatives might impact on the delivery of services by our allied health practitioners, the Office sponsored an inter-professional practice forum on 12 September 2008. Thirty-two clinicians attended the 3 ½ hour forum. The evaluation of the forum indicated that fourteen participants found the forum somewhat useful and eleven rated it as very useful. The report from the forum is not yet on the Office website, but anyone interested can obtain a copy by contacting us directly.

Across Health Services and the Department

July

I had the opportunity to meet with Hannah Seymore and Andrea Lomman regarding the Falls Prevention Network. We discussed some of the barriers to the expanded scope of practice and how to address some of these issues. The Falls Prevention Network sees many opportunities for expanded or advanced scope of practice for allied health professionals. With the focus on providing the best care for patients, it is important for us to be open to shared competencies across allied health disciplines and collaborating with each other through inter-professional learning experiences.

I am very pleased to have been asked to join the Mental Health Workforce Taskforce for the Mental Health Division. This will provide a great opportunity for the Office to provide advice to the Division and support to the allied health professionals within mental health services.

The Office has met with Elizabeth Rohwedder from the Health Reform Implementation Taskforce (HRIT) to look at how the Department's demand modeling can be used to assist in the planning of allied health and health science services. We are also having this conversation with our counterparts across the country and will continue to look at ways to use demand modeling that fits the service delivery of our professional groups.

I was also very pleased to be invited to attend the July meeting of the North Metropolitan Area Health Service Allied Health Council and to have the opportunity to discuss some of the ongoing concerns for allied health professionals in this health service.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Dr Rowan Davidson and Janet Peacock from the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist (OCP). Among issues discussed were credentialing of allied health professionals as well as professional responsibility for patient care for registered allied health practitioners in mental health.



August

The Office met with the chairs of the four area health services allied health councils. We have agreed to meet every two months to share information about what is happening within the health services as well as within the Office.

I also met with the Office of Safety and Quality (OSQ) and met up with some old (as in time since working together - certainly not in age!) allied health acquaintances from King Edward and Princess Margaret - Lyn David and Caroline Diggins. Lyn is the manager for the Office and Caroline is the senior policy officer for clinical safety and risk. We discussed how the CHPO can support the OSQ in improving quality of services provided by allied health and health science professionals. In terms of sentinel events, it appears that there are issues around how professionals communicate within teams. Lyn and Caroline also highlighted the need for Allied Health and Health Sciences (AH & HS) staff to become active in the reporting of incidents through the AIMS process.

September

I had the opportunity to meet with Michelle Koskey and Maxine Drake from the Health Consumers Council. Michelle and Maxine expressed the Council's ongoing support of the role of allied health within health service delivery and the expanded scope of practice for these professions.

National Issues

The Office had the opportunity to attend one of the forums put on by the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission. The Commission did seem interested in the increased role that allied health professions could have in the future of health reform. Recommendations from the Commission are expected to be released in December or January and it will be interesting to see what is proposed for these professions for the future.

One of the roles of the CHPO is to attend the bi-monthly meetings of the National Allied Health Advisory Committee (NAHAC). This national committee is made up of persons in similar roles to CHPO in each state and we use this forum to share information about what each state is doing in different areas of mutual interest. In July, we discussed the impact of the Vocational Education Training (VET) training places offered by the Federal Government and how this committee could provide input into the work of the National Health Workforce Taskforce.

National Registration and Accreditation has been agreed to by COAG and as this will initially affect four of our professions: pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology. To help with the implementation of this national scheme, the Office and the Department's Legal and Legislative Services have agreed to meet monthly to work on the issues related to this new legislation.

In August, I attended the Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) Conference in Yeppoon, Queensland. This was an excellent conference and provided the Office with an abundance of information on a number of innovative services being developed in rural and remote areas. There was also a great deal of focus on the use of assistants in allied health and I attended a special forum around this issue. There were also excellent presentations made from WA Country Health Service (WACHS) allied health staff: Anushka Bandaranaike (Physiotherapist - Port Headland), Lauren Ercegovich (Dietitian - Kununurra), Heather Jensen (Occupational therapist - Ngaanyatjarra Health Council), Tracy Leon (Dietitian - Kununurra), Ivan Lin (Physiotherapist - Geraldton), Lenny Aronsten (Physiotherapist - Ngaanyatjarra Health Service), Laura Coakes (Speech Pathologist - Kimberley Region), Partho Pal (Audiologist - Kalgoorlie), Alex Ellis (Physiotherapist - Kalgoorlie).



Universities

The Office met with Associate Professor Tony Wright, Head of School of Physiotherapy, Curtin, to discuss ways in which universities and health sites can better coordinate placement of students. The Office may be facilitating a meeting of all university placement coordinators in the New Year with the goal of improving how placement schedules are planned and coordinated.

Dr Deborah Wilmoth, PsyD
Chief Health Professions Officer

Project Updates

Exit Report

This report contains the outcomes of the Health Professional exit data project. The purpose of the project was to carry out an environmental scan to examine the current exit survey process and to outline how the CHPO can define retention issues for the health professionals in the future.

The project investigated whether health professionals' exit data is available from the Health Corporate Network (HCN) administered exit survey process. The project also examined the results from the 2006 Best Practice Australia Climate Survey, WA Allied Health and Health Science Professionals' perspective. The key findings from the survey suggest that health professionals leave due to a variety of reasons including: better opportunities elsewhere, age and retirement, better pay elsewhere, upper management, high stress and frustration, travel and change. Although it is difficult to control all of these factors, it is essential that the CHPO understand the key characteristics of the reason for leaving an organisation. This will enable the CHPO to advocate for a range of initiatives that could improve staff satisfaction and ultimately staff retention.

This report highlights the considerable amount of work already taking place across WA Health to address workforce retention issues. A number of recommendations are proposed to help improve the understanding of health professionals' retention issues in the future. The report will soon be available on the CHPO website.

Vacancy Reporting Project

We have started to collect quarterly data that will help to inform workforce supply and demand initiatives in the future. One of the first steps is to capture the number of vacancies that have been difficult to fill due to workforce shortages.

We have asked for information on any position which has been vacant (unfilled) for 3 months or more (this allows for normal HR recruitment process). To assist the CHPO to collect complete data, managers are encouraged to return a 'nil' response if they have no vacant positions.

To date, the numbers of vacancies reported have been relatively low across all professions. Some managers have reported that the real issue is getting staff with the appropriate level of experience or other HR issues. Once we have established the baseline data which reflects true labour force shortage, we plan to identify some of the other issues.

It's important that all managers assist with the data collection as this information is crucial in helping us to assist you in raising awareness of workforce supply issue.





Graduate Certificates for Allied Health Practitioner in Mental Health

The Division of Mental Health and the Office of Chief Health Professions are pleased to announce that the scholarship program initiated last year will be offered again in 2009-2010 for Graduate Certificates in Mental Health Practice. Eligible disciplines are social work, occupational therapy, nutrition/dietetics, physiotherapy who are working in the Health Department Western Australia or in Non-government organisations (NGOs) which are funded by the Mental Health Division. These professionals will be providing mental health service or come into contact with people with mental health issues in programs for adults, older adults, adolescents and children.

The intent of the 2009-10 scholarship program is to enhance the knowledge of allied health professionals in mental health with meeting service delivery goals in line with the National Mental Health Practice and to attract and retain well-qualified and experienced staff, whilst ensuring the organisation is at the forefront of industry practice. It is expected that the successful applicants will commit to continued work in the WA Department of Health or related NGOs for 12 months minimum after achieving the Graduate Certificate.

The deadline for applications is 10 February 2009. For inquiries or an information package phone the Chief Health Professions Office at 9222-4203.

Tracking Seasonal Labour Force Variations for Allied Health & Health Science Professions

CHPO staff have just received head count of full time employee (FTE) data for the period of 2000 to 2008 from Health Workforce. FTE data for period June 2007 to June 2008 has been graphed by Luis Ferreira. Staff will begin looking at the data for each of the 23 professions from next week.

Medical Radiation Technologist (MRT) Labour Force Survey

Work on editing the survey used for occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and podiatry commenced this week. The aim is to improve the format of the survey to remove ambiguities and minimise error, eliminate redundant questions, and ensure proposed National Data Set elements are included. Survey length will be minimised to make sure that it can be included with registration documents dispatched by MRT Registration Board. Consultation with Health Workforce will take place when first draft is completed

Occupational Therapy Labour Force Survey Report

This data has been analysed and the draft report is currently being edited. The report will be tabled at the next Strategic Committee Meeting scheduled for 10 December 2008.

Physiotherapy Labor Force Survey

Analysis will be commenced in December 2008.





Assistants in Allied Health & Health Science Workforce Project

The Assistants in Allied Health and Health Science Workforce Project involves profiling the current assistant workforce, engaging WA Health stakeholders to define assistant scope of practice, governance, delegation, and supervision structures, refining recognition of prior learning processes, and identifying the need for future uptake of higher qualifications for assistants to support the professional workforce. The information obtained from this project will be vital for future workforce planning for the health professionals across WA Health.

Recent progress made with the project includes:

- The workforce profile survey of the current allied health and health science assistant workforce and survey report has been completed;
- A discussion paper on allied health assistants has been completed and will be distributed for consultation;
- Deborah Wilmoth attended a National Allied Health Assistants Network meeting in August and discussed work around allied health assistants with allied health representatives from other states.

From the workforce profile it was evident that the health science assistant training and qualification structures were more highly developed than allied health assistant training. Therefore the next stages of this project will focus on further development of allied health assistant roles, training and qualifications, with particular focus on the assistant roles or positions included in the Certificate III and IV in Allied Health Assistant Qualifications.

Focus groups will be offered for the managers or supervisors of generic and profession specific allied health assistants within WA Health to address questions raised in the discussion paper. Focus groups are expected to be run early in 2009 depending on expressions of interest.

Submissions including responses to the questions in the discussion paper are welcomed from stakeholders within WA health who have already completed this work on assistants in their area, and interested stakeholders outside of WA Health who would like to contribute to this project work.

Information

Hands on Scotland - NHS Website Resource

Hands on Scotland is an online resource for anybody working with children and young people. The website provides practical information and techniques on how to respond helpfully to children and young people's troubling behaviour, build up their self-esteem, and promote their positive mental wellbeing

For more information please visit the website at www.handsonscotland.co.uk

The website is commissioned by the Scottish Government through Heads Up Scotland and was developed by Playfield Institute (NHS Fife) in partnership with Barnardo's and the University of Dundee.





New Staff

Bernadette Bragg came to Perth in June 2007 from New Zealand when she started work at Royal Perth Hospital as a Social Worker across different specialties before commencing at the Department of Health two weeks ago. Prior to leaving New Zealand, Bernadette was a Medical Social Worker, specialising in pregnancy counselling under various District Health Boards. Her qualification is a Post Graduate Diploma in Social and Community Work. Prior to her qualification, she was a support worker in mental health and intellectual disabilities/challenging behaviours, a volunteer worker at DARE to Make a Change Program, run by New Zealand Police for children struggling with making positive choices in their lives, a telephone counsellor for Youthline, and a homework tutor.

Bernadette's move to Australia was prompted by a desire to live and work in a new country, and the weather! Oh and the money. She likes to work out in the gym, as well as eating good food. She is a huge reader, enjoys socialising with friends, touring the WA countryside, cooking, music, and taking time out for herself.

At the Department of Health, Bernadette is working on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Project. This project is aimed at attracting and retaining staff in areas of workforce shortage and asks Allied Health and Science (AH & HS) Professionals what is needed to implement and make CPD work across their disciplines. Last month, the discussion paper, the result of the CPD survey undertaken in November 2007 went out to AH & HS Professionals. The paper asked 9 questions. Responses have been collated. The next step is to draw up Draft Policy.

Andrea Lange graduated with BA (English) in 1983. She did 14 years working in staff development and marketing roles in both the public and private sectors. Andrea graduated with 1st class honours in Psychology in 2002 (while studying, lectured in team building, communication, business maths at TAFE). Since 2003 Andrea has worked on a number of allied health related research projects at UWA. Andrea has established and managed three studies that include; Factors affecting walking and cycling behaviour or primary school children (the NHMRC-funded TREK Project) for the School of Population Health; Group Singing and Health in Older People (pilot study) for the School of Music; GP Referral to Group Singing (pilot study) for the School of Music.

