

Reshaping services to reinvigorate our workforce – A technician led service review



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Background

At the Royal Melbourne Hospital our dispensary service is responsible for dispensing for more than 700 beds.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption in work processes and patient flow.

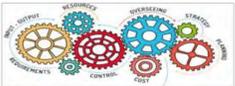
Challenges faced included:

- Surge in hospital bed demand, resulting in increased pressure for timely inpatient and discharge medication dispensing
- Staff shortages due to COVID-19 infection
- Unprecedented depletion in wellbeing (burnout)
- Resignation of pharmacy staff (seeking work outside the healthcare sector)

A need to reinvigorate our dispensary service and its technician workforce was identified. We identified key focus areas to align with the needs of the individuals providing the service, and of the organisation.

Objectives

OPERATIONS



- Review dispensary processes within the pharmacy technicians scope of practice
- Implement new strategies
- Respond to emerging demands of the organisation
- Meet the needs of our patients

WORKFORCE



- Team structure review
- Staff retention
- Upskilling with new roles and responsibilities

WELLBEING



- Create a structure of wellbeing
- Minimise psychosocial hazards
- Reduce burnout and impacts to mental health

Methods

A consultative technician-led review of dispensary technician staffing, roles and communication channels was conducted, through focus groups, surveys and leadership.

The following changes were implemented:

- Communication channels were streamlined from six channels to two; with phone communication prioritised for urgent issues only.
- Technician shift times were staggered to increase presence during dispensary operating hours.
- Technician roles within dispensary were further defined and rostered based on workflow demand

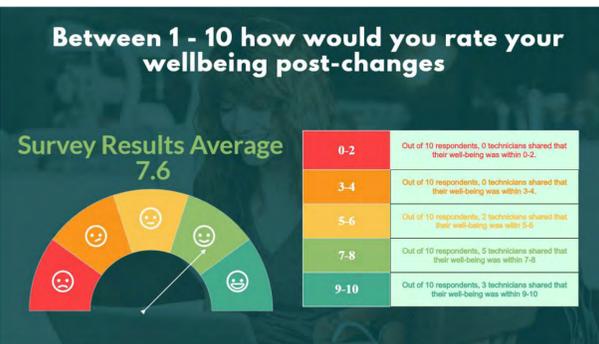
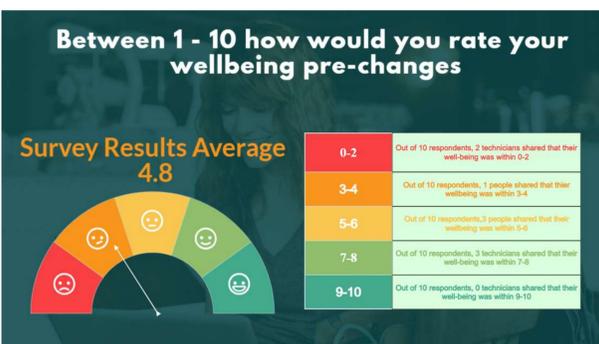
Staff wellbeing scores and delays to medication supply were monitored before and after the changes were implemented, and staff feedback obtained after.

Evaluation

Delays in medication supply were rapidly reduced after implementing changes. Staff reported that the changes resulted in smoother workflows and a calmer work environment.

Streamlined communication channels facilitated the appropriate redirection of queries, eradicating disruptions to dispensing roles whilst also facilitating efficient resolution of medication supply issues for clinical pharmacy staff.

Staff wellbeing scores grew significantly due to greater flexibility in shift times and distribution of workload throughout the day.



The expansion of traditional hours eased the concentration of inpatient orders and discharges without an increase in technician EFT. This decreased technician presence over quieter periods by 50% and provided continuity of the service. Average order processing times subsequently decreased.

Overlapping the late service (1700-2100) and day service (915-1800) eliminated unnecessary handover.

Defined roles gave consistency to the technicians, providing higher job satisfaction from ownership of a role that allowed a balance of autonomy, responsibility and relationship within the team without previous pressures or conflict of priorities.

This secondarily led to an engaging, rewarding and supportive work environment that helped alleviate some staff retention issues seen previously during the height of the pandemic.



The Pharmacy team at Royal Melbourne Hospital

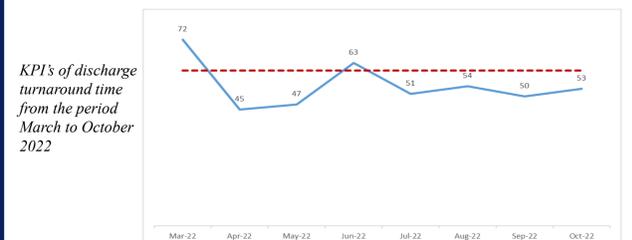
Discussion

We demonstrated that functional services do not always require additional resources to overcome challenges. Rather, a review of existing resources to ensure they are fit for purpose and adaptable to change can also improve efficiency.

This was begun with an open forum of technicians led by the technical leads to gather information specific for the department. Noticing the trends and common themes of discontentment attached to the service.

Service changes were implemented with a soft roll out approach to ensure service continuity and the ability to focus on the spectrum of impact. Re-reviewing occurred continuously with adequate feedback from the technicians until a medium between the service and its ability to uplift and maintain wellbeing at a high norm which increased productivity

Streamlining processes, e.g. work hours decreased inefficiencies (e.g. duplicated handover) and allowed KPI targets to be consistently met in areas such as ED medication supply and discharge turnover which can contribute to the safe delivery of timely patient care and co-ordination of patient flow.



This technician-led review contributes to the growing movement of technician-led dispensaries and highlights the unique role that Pharmacy Technicians play in driving improvement of Pharmacy services.

Conclusion

Wellbeing is about creating working environments and systems that support employees with the challenges they face. Responding to those challenges through service reviews and consultation often improves efficiency, retention, and job satisfaction.

Improved wellbeing in the workplace can reduce the levels of absenteeism within hospital when contributing factors amplify staff shortages – a major contributor of burnout and mental health crises healthcare professionals are at a higher risk from the nature of their roles.

These results show that pharmacy technicians can lead change that is effective and positive when they are at the forefront of reviews and consultation

Acknowledgements

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