

Small Capital and Equipment Program

Final report

Establishment of videoconferencing facilities to support education and networking across Bass Coast and South Gippsland general practices

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Background and context

The aim of this project was to increase the capacity of seven general practices within Bass Coast and South Gippsland to provide high-quality student education and training through the introduction of videoconferencing facilities within each practice. Each practice is involved in training nursing and medical students, interns and registrars. Practice GPs provide visiting medical officer services to Bass Coast Regional Health (Wonthaggi), Gippsland Southern Health Service (Leongatha & Korumburra), South Gippsland Hospital (Foster) and Yarram and District Health Service (Yarram). Practice staff are closely involved in local hospital programs with representation on committees and with regular teaching activities. Each medical centre is a training practice with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, as well as the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine. The practices also have affiliations with the Australian Medical Association, Rural Doctors Association, the Gippsland Medicare Local and Monash University.

The challenges to the delivery of Best Practice clinical education included the need for medical students to travel from their practice placement to neighbouring towns in order to attend university-organised tutorials and workshops on a weekly basis. Location of videoconferencing facilities within the medical practices would allow medical and nursing students to access education locally, saving time and travel expenses. There were limited opportunities for students, interns, GP registrars and staff to attend metropolitan-based education sessions due to the requirement to allow a minimum of three to six hours travelling to and from the training venue. In addition, there were difficulties for local clinical supervisors and trainers to attend meetings with universities regarding placement issues due to lack of videoconferencing facilities and restricted ability to increase the clinics' capacity for provision of high-quality student supervision without additional communications technology. Connectivity deficits resulted in a lack of opportunities for case conferencing between students and trainers in the region and limited opportunities for interprofessional collaboration between students from different disciplines. The provision of videoconferencing facilities will allow students to attend university-based lectures, workshops, meetings and tutorials without leaving the medical centres.

Project objectives and expected impacts

This project sought to enhance the available infrastructure for clinical learning environments (CLEs) to support students and placement providers in Bass Coast and South Gippsland general practices within the Gippsland Clinical Placement Network (GiCPN). Through installation of videoconferencing facilities at these general practices, this project would promote the delivery of the following objectives:

- Increase the capacity of local general practices to provide high-quality education and training to an increased number of medical and nursing students;
- Ensure students at Bass Coast and South Gippsland general practices receive equal access to educational opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts, without having to travel long distances;
- Enhance the ability of rural general practices to attract students interested in participating in rural clinical placements;
- Enable students to participate in tutorials, meetings and interprofessional education sessions held throughout the subregion without having to leave the clinic; and
- Enable increased collaboration and communication between the seven practice sites and local hospitals.

Expected impacts

Installation of videoconferencing facilities at these general practices will enable the clinics to maintain their high standard of student supervision and education, whilst ensuring students have local access to regional and university-based learning opportunities. It is expected that videoconferencing facilities will assist the practices to attract more students to the clinics, enable clinics to provide collaborative educational sessions and supervisors will have increased opportunities to receive ongoing support and education regarding student supervision. Students attending placements within Bass Coast/South Gippsland general practices may consider returning to work in the area post-graduation.

Project management

After initial issues with the planned provider who informed the project team that they could not meet the terms of the contract as required, the purchase and installation of the equipment was then negotiated and undertaken by Gippsland Health Alliance (GHA). A project manager was appointed by GHA and the project charter developed and approved by the business group. The advisory team comprised the GHA chief information officer and representatives from general practices and Medicare Local.

From the completion of installation, practice managers based within each general practice will have the responsibility for the ongoing management of their videoconferencing facilities and will contact Gippsland Health Alliance (GHA) to ensure any problems with equipment are rectified.

Project performance against stated deliverables

This project incorporated activities to deliver videoconference infrastructure to general practices within South Gippsland and Bass Coast to provide support for promoting quality clinical learning environments for this sector within the GiCPN. The project team liaised with the key stakeholders to engage with staff, identify pertinent sites within the practices for equipment placement and/or other support required to facilitate installation. The sites included: Wonthaggi Medical Group, South Gippsland Family Medicine, Leongatha Healthcare, Korumburra Medical Clinic, Foster Medical Centre, Phillip Island Medical Group and Yarram Medical Centre.

Whilst the rollout of the project was initially delayed because the planned supplier was unable to deliver the project outcomes, a new supplier was appointed which allowed the project to be completed as planned, albeit somewhat behind the original schedule.

Project activity	Project deliverable/target	Due date	Status
Videoconferencing facility installation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully functional videoconferencing facility installed in all seven practices 	March 2012	Complete
Staff confident to operate videoconferencing equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All relevant GP staff trained by GHA project officer to operate videoconferencing facility within each practice Number of videoconferencing sessions held per month by each practice 	June 2012	Complete
Videoconferencing equipment fully utilised by students and their supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of videoconferencing equipment by students and supervisors for education and training purposes Videoconferencing linkages between educational institutions and other GP practices Videoconferencing use for interprofessional education sessions 	November 2012	Complete

Project outcomes

This project delivered all of the planned objectives within the extended timeframe. Videoconferencing facilities have been installed within seven general practices in the South Gippsland and Bass Coast area, with additional provision of connectivity to Monash University. Practice staff have undertaken training in the use of the new equipment and each practice has committed to provide ongoing IT support.

The installation of videoconferencing facilities at local general practices has:

- Facilitated opportunities to provide additional medical and nursing student placements within each practice
- Increased access for learners to university and metropolitan-based meetings, lectures and education sessions
- Promoted effective communication for trainers and supervisors with the associated universities
- Allowed supervisors to participate in meetings without spending time travelling to educational institutions
- Permitted the practices to remain competitive in attracting students and trainees to a rural area
- Developed new linkages between the practices and other education providers
- Facilitated the ability of practices to obtain ongoing accreditation as RACGP training providers and promoting Best Practice learning environments
- Reduced time and travel costs for students to attend tutorials and interprofessional case conferences with other students and trainers in the region
- Provided for additional continuing professional development opportunities for students and staff
- Enhanced greater collaboration and sharing of resources between GP practices and local hospitals
- Participation of practice staff and students in research projects
- Promoted opportunities for interprofessional collaboration between students from different disciplines throughout the subregion
- Increased student numbers attending high-quality placements within rural medical practices which may encourage more students to work in Bass Coast/South Gippsland or other rural practices post-graduation.

Evaluation

This equipment and associated training allows students and supervisors in these general practices access to an articulated system for communicating and collaborating with each other, as well as education providers and other health services within the region. The project has been successful in meeting planned objectives; with follow-up surveys of the practices identifying significant increases in a range of parameters, as highlighted in Table 1. The videoconference installations have increased the capability and quality of seven rural general practices to provide learning and supervision support for students undertaking clinical placements within their organisations. The valued outcome of the project has been the delivery of enhanced clinical learning environments by increasing connectivity to augment clinical supervision, student learning and interprofessional opportunities when undertaking rural placements in these general practices.

Table 1: Evaluation outcomes

Outcome	Pre-videoconference facility installation	Post-videoconference facility installation	Difference
Number of medical and nursing student placements at general practices pre and post-installation of videoconferencing facilities.	Medical students:15/month Nursing students: 2/month	Medical students:21/month Nursing students: 4/month	Medical student numbers: 40% increase Nursing student numbers: 200% increase
Number of external education sessions attended by students at Bass Coast and South Gippsland general practices pre/post-installation of videoconferencing facilities.	External education sessions: 3/month	External education sessions: 9/month	Attendance at external education sessions: 300% increase
Number of university-based clinical supervision meetings attended by students and supervisors pre and post-installation of videoconferencing facilities.	University-based supervision meetings attended (in person): 16/month	University-based supervision meetings attended (in person or by videoconference): 19/month	University-based supervision meetings attended: 19% increase
Cost and time savings associated with reduced requirement to travel to meetings and seminars in metropolitan centres.		Travel time saved through attending meetings/seminars by videoconference: 18 hours/month	Reduction in travel time: 18 hours
Ongoing training linkages with Monash University Gippsland Rural Medical and Nursing Schools and RACGP.	Current training linkages maintained	Linkages made with two additional universities since establishment of videoconferencing facilities	Additional two training links developed
Number of interprofessional education opportunities utilised by students pre/post-installation of videoconferencing facilities.	Interprofessional education sessions: 1/month	Interprofessional education sessions: 3/month	Increase in interprofessional education sessions: 300%

Key learnings

The videoconference installations have increased the capability of seven rural general practices to provide learning and supervision support for students undertaking clinical placements within their organisations. The valued outcome of the project has been the delivery of enhanced clinical learning environments within these rural practices by increasing connectivity to augment clinical supervision, learning and interprofessional opportunities for students undertaking rural placements in these general practices.

Conclusion

This project provided videoconferencing infrastructure and connectivity to strengthen the clinical learning environments within seven general practices in Bass Coast and South Gippsland. This infrastructure has provided supervisors and students with a valuable communication channel during clinical placements and afforded teaching and interprofessional opportunities to be captured locally and without time loss. The provision of this supportive infrastructure promotes the quality of the clinical learning environment, greater engagement and collaboration with other organisations and potential to increase placement capacity.