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| Final report  Small Capital and Equipment |

Finding a space for students

Date completed: 30 November 2012

Background and context

Primary care has been recognised as an underutilised source of clinical placements, a situation that does not reflect the fact that for most of the community their experience of healthcare will be in the primary health care sector. Paradoxically most undergraduate health care training takes place in the acute sector. There is evidence that suggests that a positive clinical placement experience will encourage a student to return to that clinical setting, and it is therefore important for the development of the future workforce that current students receive quality placements in a primary care setting.

The After‑Hours GP Clinic (AHGPC) is run by Inner East Melbourne Medicare Local (IEMML), and operates at a separate satellite site in Box Hill during the after-hours period as defined by Medicare. During ‘normal’ hours the space is utilised by other services of IEMML.

The AHGPC is staffed by a roster of vocationally registered General Practitioners (GPs) from the local area. Currently a very small number of students are placed at the AHGPC, generally accompanying the GP supervising them during their general practice placement if he/she has a shift at the clinic. Currently there is no dedicated student space within the satellite site and students share space with the clinical staff.

In addition to the AHGPC, IEMML hosts a relatively small number of students from the nursing discipline within its clinical services area. Again, there is no dedicated student space within the offices and students currently share space with the clinical staff within their office space.

The current lack of appropriate accommodation and facilities do not encourage staff to take on students and the experience of the students is compromised by the lack of a dedicated space and the sharing of desk space with clinical staff.

There is an increasing scope within the clinical services provided by IEMML at both sites for student placements as new funding programs are announced as part of the primary health care reforms but exposure of students to these is limited by the current infrastructure.

It is envisaged that both sites will have the capacity to host co located services, which may involve clinical service delivery and that the placement of students by those services would be enhanced by dedicated student facilities.

The development of the workforce is an ongoing objective for Medicare Locals.

Project objectives and expected impacts

To provide student spaces in two IEMML sites:

* In Box Hill at the AHGPC;

In Burwood at the main IEMML offices that can be used by students on placement for private study, small group tuition and in the case of the AHGPC offer the opportunity for parallel consulting by providing a space that can be used as an additional consulting room.

Expected impacts are:

* A 50% increase in the capacity of IEMML sites to host student placements from disciplines including but not limited to, medicine and nursing;
* Improved quality of the placement for the students as measured by student feedback;
* Improved quality of the placement from the supervisor’s perspective, resulting in increased engagement with clinical placements.

Project activities

Project activities included:

* Scoping of minimum standard equipment for student teaching in a GP clinic;
* Scoping of journals, texts and teaching resources for entry-level medical and nursing students and their supervisors;
* Scoping of refurbishment and structural changes at two sites as part of commissioning of two new sites. These new sites and the relocation to them, were decided after the initial proposal was accepted by Department of Health and necessitated variations to the initial proposal;
* Purchase of equipment, refurbishment of sites;
* Evaluation of the new spaces.

Project management

Governance

The Executive Officer of the AHGPC has overseen the procurement of equipment and fit out of the AHGPC in its new location in Box Hill.

The Director of Business Services at IEMML has overseen the procurement of equipment and fit‑out of the student/learning spaces at the new IEMML site in Burwood.

Stakeholder engagement and consultations

Staff from both the AHGPC and IEMML who supervised students were canvassed for their views on resources that would be of use to students and their supervisors in the primary care environment. University Departments of General Practice were consulted about the minimum equipment they considered appropriate for the teaching of students.

Budget

As part of the move to the new IEMML offices in East Burwood there were changes to the initially planned purchases of AV equipment, due to the changed number of teaching/learning spaces, this needed changes to the budget line items.

Timelines

The timelines for this project were not met completely. This was due to the relocation to new premises of both of the services in the original proposal – both IEMML and AHGPC successfully located new premises and relocated during the period of the project. Owing to the refurbishment required at both locations there were delays in the availability of access to enable planning for the new spaces. At both locations there were a number of configurations considered before a final layout was agreed and this delayed the planning for the student spaces that were funded by this project. The full impacts of the project have not had a chance to be realised – the full impact will only be able to be measured and appreciated once the new academic year of 2013 is well underway.

Project performance against stated deliverables

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| Project activity | Project deliverable/target | Due date | Status |
| Planning | Detailed project plan and quotes for all proposed purchases and fit-out | March 2012 | Complete |
| Refurbishment and fit-out | Refurbishment, fit out and purchase of equipment as required | June 2012 | Complete |
| Evaluation | Evaluation report | May 2013 | In progress but undeliverable with final report |

The project has substantially achieved its stated objectives by providing student spaces at the two IEMML sites. At the East Burwood site there is now a teaching and learning centre with two training rooms fitted-out with AV equipment (not all purchased with this grant) and a student study space dedicated solely for student use. At the AHGPC there is now a room that can be used flexibly as a consulting room for students (making three consulting rooms where previously there were two) or as a small group learning room/meeting room with AV capability. It has been fully equipped with the necessary equipment for it to be used as a consulting room. The kitchen/tea room, which in the original plan was to be gutted and refurbished as a student study space, has instead been retained for the use of students and staff as an informal meeting space.

It is not possible to say that the objective relating to the percentage increase in placements has been met and this is largely due to the timing of the project. Any increase cannot be realised this academic year (2012) and will only be fully realised at the conclusion of the 2013 academic year.

Project outcomes

The outcomes of this project are not yet fully realised as their completion has happened at the end of the current academic year, but there are many activities planned for the new teaching/learning spaces in the coming academic year. Clinical placements for nursing students have been agreed through the statewide placement planning activities and it is hoped that the initial positive reactions to the new spaces from both staff and students are indicative of the future. In addition the teaching/learning spaces at the East Burwood offices will be used to support key Eastern Metropolitan Clinical Placement Network (EMCPN) activities including the Teaching on the Run (TOTR) project funded as part of the supervision supports program. Two facilitator workshops over 3.5 days will be run at the IEMML offices using the new teaching/learning spaces. As part of the EMCPN Expanded Settings for Clinical Placements project being run at IEMML there is a deliverable of a CPD network and it is planned that the TOTR facilitator workshops will be the foundation for future workshops being delivered at the IEMML East Burwood site to supervisors from a variety of disciplines.

Two projects, in varying degrees of development, will be using the AHGPC facilities in the next academic year.

One, just completing its pilot phase, is the Patient Teaching Associates Project, being run by the Eastern Health Clinical School to benefit medical students of Monash and Deakin Universities. This involves using ‘real’ volunteer patients as partners in the learning activities of the students and is based on a program running in Launceston. Community volunteers are equal partners in the learning experience with the students and the teaching staff, and will be recruited through a variety of means, including through IEMML and its members. The facilities at the AHGPC have proven to be conducive to the effective running of the pilot – the GP clinic setup is more attractive than an outpatient department, the kitchen/tea room facility allows students, staff and patients to come together informally and the entire facility can be used exclusively by the PTA project. The possibilities of this model are many – once the patient volunteer database is well established education can be extended to other disciplines and to learners other than entry-level, and also to interdisciplinary models of learning.

The AHGPC will also be running a pilot of hosting entry-level medical students during the after-hours period. General practices which operate exclusively in the after-hours period are not eligible for the Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) for teaching, which goes some way to reimbursing the costs of supervising medical students. The patient types utilising after hours services are quite different to that attending during ‘normal’ operating hours, and include the more acutely unwell patients requiring general practice services. This project is being undertaken in partnership with Monash University

Evaluation

The positive aspects of the small capital and equipment project are that there was a budget available to contribute to the development of spaces and resources for students. As a not-for-profit organisation that does not receive any dedicated funding for training and development it is extremely difficult to provide the infrastructure and resources for the placement of students. This grant has enabled such development to occur.

This project didn’t run to plan. As previously mentioned both IEMML sites located new premises (both in need of refurbishment) and relocated during the period of the project. This required a number of revisions of the capital works and a variation to the proposal – all of which took time and caused delays to the project. All of this also took place during a time of rapid expansion of the Medicare Local, which of necessity at times caused there to be a change in the priorities of the organisation, and sometimes the capital works for students took second place to the needs of new staff members. The fact that the works were not substantially complete until well into the second semester of the academic year meant that a thorough evaluation of the spaces as initially planned was impossible. In retrospect it was probably unrealistic to expect that the works could be completed and a thorough evaluation could ever be achieved in the available time frame when the organisation was in a period of such great change both geographically and organisationally. It was also more difficult than anticipated to arrange access to electronic resources – some were already available via clinical software but available only to certain staff. Others were prohibitively expensive for a small to medium organisation and others were too difficult to manage without a dedicated library resource. This is a challenge that we have not yet fully overcome. There is a new position being recruited (research officer) and it is anticipated that the central management of resources such as electronic subscriptions and access to them will be within that position’s scope.

The key learnings to take forward fall into two categories: project planning and implementation and future opportunities. Capital works projects for infrastructure to be used by students probably need to have an eighteen‑month timeframe to allow adequate time for the completion of the works and an evaluation. This is certainly the case with this project where the relocation of the two sites in a time of organisational expansion made things more complex. When this project was first envisaged the only firm outcomes predicted were nursing placements at the IEMML site and medical students during the after-hours period at the AHGPC. During the project period a number of opportunities have arisen, such as the PTA project and the TOTR project and we have been able to support them.

Conclusion

This project has been of great value to the education of students in the primary care environment. It has enabled the provision and resourcing of spaces for students at two quite different sites of the Medicare Local, and will have flow on effects to the broader primary care environment through the use of the spaces for the teaching of supervision skills to health professionals supervising students and through opportunities for partnerships in the teaching of students in the primary care setting.