

Merri Community Health Services – Creating a student-friendly hub in Coburg

Date completed: 30 May 2013

Background and context

This project resulted in Merri Community Health Services (MCHS) increasing clinical placements at its 93 Bell Street, Coburg site. The Coburg site is one of MCHS's main service delivery sites. It required significant infrastructure upgrade to improve physical amenities for clients/customers of the site, students and staff members, whilst also increasing clinical service capacity.

This project delivered the establishment of dedicated student facilities to establish a centre of excellence for clinical placements within MCHS. MCHS has a strong commitment to student placement and education of the workforce and has increased student placements by over 17% in the last twelve months.

The refurbishment of the Coburg site has increased capacity to provide additional allied health and chronic care/disease prevention models through the establishment of enhanced facilities, technology and capacity to take on additional staffing and student placements. The following building works have been completed:

- Refurbishment of existing clinical space to establish a student hub for up to six students at any one time and associated office (desks, seating, office furniture) and information technology fit-out (iPads, desk phones and secure integration of personally owned iPhones, IT equipment to the MCHS network).
- Alterations to an existing multi-purpose clinical space (to accommodate the student hub and relocate the existing clinical service).
- Refurbishment of existing physiotherapy treatment space to establish additional treatment capacity for use by students under the supervision of clinicians.
- Building alterations to create a small tutorial space including office and technology fit-out (with interactive smart whiteboard, projection and conferencing capabilities).

The Small Capital and Equipment Program contributed towards enhancing existing facilities. Building works for the student hub was built into Stage 1 of construction which was completed by the end of May 2013. The total refurbishment of the site will be complete by the end of July 2013.

MCHS invested significant funds in order to maximise capacity within the building envelope. Scope of building works included:

- Full building heating and cooling system replacement with individual reverse cycle, split type zoned airconditioning equipment (seventeen units and two multi-head units) plus installation, full replacement of hard and flexible ducts, duct thermal insulation, grilles and diffusers and associated electrical costs.
- New light fitting replacement and installation for full building.
- Associated building and structural works with the installation of the above, replacement ceiling works, supply and installation of insulation to ceiling cavities, complete replacement of client and staff bathroom and kitchen amenities, creation of new clinical spaces for service provision, re-design of reception area and reception desk and general refurbishment of the site (painting, replacement flooring, replacement window furnishings, replacement external entrance for improved client safety).

It should be noted that MCHS attracted additional funding to improve energy efficiency within the building. The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency approved funding to upgrade the lighting, heating and cooling as part of the Commonwealth Energy Efficiency Program grant funding. Therefore, an additional objective was to reduce the carbon footprint of the building (and contribute towards environmental sustainability with an approximate 20% reduction in energy consumption).

Project objectives and expected impacts

Objectives

- Create effective student working spaces at 93 Bell Street, Coburg.
- Establish flexible small and medium-sized tutorial and case conferencing spaces to support clinical placement learning and information exchange between a wide range of multidisciplinary professionals.
- Provide more state-of-the-art IT and office equipment to support clinical placements.
- Provide suitable clinical equipment for use by students that supports new technologies.

Expected impacts

- Additional clinical placements by MCHS at its Coburg site. Currently clinical placements are limited due to lack of student working spaces and infrastructure support. This would result in four to six clinical placements occurring at any one point in time.
- Improved placement experience for clinical students as they will have access to more up-to-date clinical equipment, office and IT equipment, additional resources and a pleasing working environment.
- Support student involvement in multidisciplinary comprehensive case conferencing for clients with chronic disease and complex care needs.
- Broaden student exposure in running group activities (where appropriate) allowing a more integrated and team-based approach for delivery to these groups.
- Have the ability to provide increased training and clinical supervision capacity for allied health students.
- Enhanced physical capacity / staff capability across a range of multidisciplinary services to take on students.
- Move toward flexible clinical and consulting space for students which can promote new models of care.
- High-quality facilities will substantially improve the work environment for student placements and best evidence-based approaches to managing chronic diseases.

Project activities and management

Project activities commenced in April 2012 and concluded in May 2013. MCHS established a project reference group comprising project partners to provide advice on the design and fit-out of the student facilities and to discuss the coordination and maximisation of clinical placements.

The project reference group included representation from MCHS [General Manager Clinical and Carer Services, Manager Allied Health, Director of Human Resources (responsibility for coordination of student placements across MCHS), and the Manager Facilities (who was the project manager responsible for facility upgrades and installation of new equipment and works)], and a representative from La Trobe University, University of Melbourne and the Northern Clinical Placement Network Project Manager. Advice was sought from the universities to ensure that the proposed works provide appropriate student working spaces.

The project reference group guided fit-out requirements for the student hub to ensure the appropriate purchase of clinical and IT equipment and to draw on university design guidelines.

The refurbishment of the Bell Street site was a major undertaking that required good stakeholder engagement and communication to all those affected by the project. Additionally there was a need to respond to any changes through the project life to ensure that the project was completed safely, efficiently, within budget and on time. A Bell Street Project Coordination group was established to assist with these matters.

The Bell Street Project Coordination Group facilitated:

- Communication with staff on project progress and changes to timeline;
- Liaison/consultation with staff regarding matters likely to impact staff during the project;
- Provided an immediate communication point for staff to raise any project matters that affected safety;
- Assisted in coordinating staff relocations during the stages of the project.

A project plan was developed which outlined key project activities and deliverables.

The project budget:

Item	Cost
Construction costs	\$120 983.37
Furniture and internal fittings costs	\$18 883.40
Information and communication technology costs	\$12 993.56
Total	\$152 860.33

Project performance against stated deliverables

Project activity	Project deliverable/target	Due date	Status
Signoff on contract with funding body	Contract negotiated and signed off	March 2012	Completed
Establish project group	Meetings held and decisions made	May 2012	Completed: Project Reference Group established and a Bell Street Project Coordination Group.
Prepare detailed scope of building works and plans – ensure in line with financial parameters and standards	Scope of building works signed off	May – June 2012	Completed: Appointment of architect and consulting engineers including a revised fee proposal to include the tender documentation phase.
Finalise design brief and plans	Design brief and plans finalised	June 2012	Completed: Development of detailed scope of works documentation and design development phase (to include confirmation of functional brief, review of construction materials and methods, integration of services designs, develop and prepare construction program, target dates and relocation plans).
Seek quotes and finalise suppliers/contractors contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quotes sought Contracts signed 	January 2013	Completed: United Commercial Projects Pty Ltd was appointed as the builder for the project.
Develop building works staging, operational and relocation timelines	Project plan finalised and signed off a copy of the staging plan and where students will be located while Stage 1 is being completed will be provided with March 2013 progress report.	February 2013	Completed: Project split across five to six stages over a six-month period to approximately the end of July 2013. The student hub/tutorial works scheduled into Stages 1. With the upgrade/addition of clinical space completed during Stage 2.
Undertake works for Stage 1 and develop contingency plan.	Agreed works completed whilst minimising disruption to operations	May 2013	Completed
Increase capacity for clinical placement	Four students to have commenced clinical placements	March – May 2013	Achieved
Support multidisciplinary practice	Involvement of students in multidisciplinary care	March – May 2013	Achieved
Finalise project report	Complete final project report focusing on project aims	May 2013	Completed

Therefore, the project achieved the following:

- Creation of a dedicated student office that can accommodate up to four to six students at any one time at 93 Bell Street, Coburg, Victoria.
- Establishment of a small and medium-sized tutorial and case conferencing space to support clinical placement learning and information exchange between a wide range of multidisciplinary professionals.
- Provision of more state-of-the-art IT and office equipment to support clinical placements e.g. iPads, Smart Board.
- Provision of suitable clinical equipment for use by students that supports new technologies.

It should be noted that the Minister for Health has accepted an invitation to formally 'open' the Bell Street refurbishment on 31 July 2013.

Project outcomes

The following table indicates the anticipated increased student numbers from 2012–13 (an overall 17% increase on student placements). As outlined below there has been an increase in physiotherapy, podiatry and occupational therapy students from 2012–13 at the MCHS Bell Street site.

Table 1: MCHS student placement numbers

Discipline	2012		2013	
	Number of students	Days of placement	Number of students*	Days of placement*
Social work	6	420	4	280
Physiotherapy	6	84	10	120
Occupational therapy	1	20	2	52
Podiatry	1	1	6	120
Speech pathology			1	12
Nursing			3	30
Public health/health promotion	5	76	1	18
Disability	1		1	
Allied health assistant	1		1	20
Dietetics			2	40
Mental health	1	15		
Community development			1	30
Audiology			3	
TOTALS	22	616	35	722

The following provides a summary description of students who attended in Semester 1 2013:

Podiatry students

- Four days per week for a five-week period
- The students spent time across the three teams (Wellness and Preventative Health, Chronic Care and Independent Living) spending full days with each practitioner
- Each day the students treated the assigned clients with their supervising podiatrist had been allocated
- Each student spent half a day in the HARP program
- Students gained experience treating general clients as well as sports, paediatric clients, wound care and diabetes
- Students sat in and watched their first nail surgery and one of the students administered local anaesthetic for the procedure.

Occupational therapy student

- Attended home visits with the supervisor and other staff members
- Gained experience in the use of the MERI client information management system
- Gained experience in information gathering for client assessments
- Conducted a follow-up visit and gained quotes for equipment and writing of notes
- Informal discussion with occupational therapists
- Attended group exercise programme run by allied health assistants.

Physiotherapy students

- Involvement in health promotion activities
- Involvement in HEAL (The Healthy Eating Activity and Lifestyle Modification Program) and gym groups
- Individual client treatment
- Observing other disciplines
- HARP (Hospital Admission Risk Program): Case conferencing and home visits.

Evaluation – opportunities and challenges

Opportunities

- Increased capacity for MCHS to take on additional clinical placements
- Provision of more appropriate clinical spaces to teach students
- Establishment of dedicated student-friendly spaces within a key clinical service delivery site at Bell Street
- Strengthened positive working relationship with project partners – La Trobe University, University of Melbourne and Northern Clinical Placement Network
- Improved energy efficiency and reduction of carbon footprint.

Challenges

- A variation was sought in November 2012 as the scope of building works exceeded original expectations. Originally this was to be a \$300 000 project which then became a \$1.2 million building project.
- To ensure quality of student placements, a staging plan was put in place to relocate staff/students/treatment to appropriate spaces and/or alternate sites. This plan was developed in conjunction with the builder (February 2013) to minimise disruption to services, clinical placements and staff members and maintain quality of care. Fortunately the staging plan ensured service provision and clinical placements could still continue despite renovations taking place.

Future opportunities

This project identified the need to strengthen our clinical placement procedures and evaluation processes. We now have a complete set of newly revised student placement documents that are also easily located in one central area. The documents include:

- Student placement policy and procedure
- Student induction manual
- New student details form
- Student induction checklist
- Student evaluation form.

We will be working with the Northern Clinical Placement Network to plan clinical placements for 2014 onwards.

Conclusion

This project has provided MCHS with the opportunity to establish dedicated space for clinical placements which will set a benchmark for other MCHS key service delivery sites. Infrastructure is a key enabler to facilitating clinical placements. It will strengthen relationships across clinical teams within MCHS and with our university and CPN partners.