



# **COPING WITH DEMAND AMID A HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE SHORTAGE**

WORKFORCE PLANNING FOR HEALTH 2018



# THE EFFECTS OF A WORKFORCE SHORTAGE ON HOSPITALS

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Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (Peter Mac) is the only public specialist hospital in Victoria, Australia that is dedicated to caring for people affected by cancer. With over 2,500 staff, including more than 580 laboratory and clinical researchers, they're focused on providing better treatments, care and potential cures for cancer. Currently, Peter Mac has 104 inpatient beds with a large ambulatory service, treating around 120 patients daily with chemotherapy or immunotherapy. Additionally, they also see patients in theatres and have around 600 outpatient appointments a day.

With such a large amount of people to care for, Jac understands how important it is to have an adequate amount of staff to ensure consistent and competent care. However, recent trends have caused the health workforce to shrink. Hospitals now have one staff member every four patients which can cause staff to work longer hours or limit the amount of care they can provide.

"I think there are a few things causing this to happen. At the moment, people aren't staying in nursing for long, often we see people stay in the workforce for 1-5 years then leave. This also affects shift nurses as well who want to move into a sector that has set hours Monday to Friday because irregular shift hours can have a huge impact on the work-life balance. Therefore, despite the large amount of graduates, it is getting harder and harder to recruit new healthcare workers for the long term.

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Unfortunately, this shortage in healthcare professionals can negatively impact hospitals and the care they provide to patients. “It limits what hospitals can do for their patients, especially in a hospital like Peter Mac, where our patients are all affected by cancer. As such there is a high demand for specialist surgeries such as radiotherapy, immunotherapy and chemotherapy. These types of surgeries require a professional with a specific skill set to administer those treatments. Therefore, when workforce shortages occur, the people who are competent in those specialist surgeries would need to work for longer hours, otherwise we would have to scale back the amount of treatments we can do daily in accordance to our workforce,” Jac explains.

In addition, because Peter Mac is a specialist hospital focused on caring for cancer patients, recruiting new staff from an already limited pool of talent is even harder. “Rarely do we hire nurses that have already been trained to be specialist cancer nurses,” Jac says. Therefore Peter Mac often have to start from scratch with their staff, taking the time to up skill them with the tasks and work environment at Peter Mac.

# SOLVING THE WORKFORCE SHORTAGE DILEMMA

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In order to cope with the issues caused by a shrinking health care workforce, Peter Mac have several strategies developed to up skill and retain their existing staff to ensure continuous high-level care at the hospital.

Firstly, Peter Mac are developing a new cancer education and training academy which will have joint facilities and new learning technologies to support a positive learning environment and provide further specialised education. This will allow them expand their capability in educating health professionals, allowing them to provide more specialist training on cancer services throughout the Victorian health system. This is in addition to their already existing in-house training procedures and education programs which help to improve the capabilities of internal staff to perform efficiently despite the workforce shortages. For example, their epidural program covers what an epidural is, the process you need to take to administer it, the pharmacology, which drugs are used, what signs to be checking for in patients undergoing an epidural and troubleshooting.

Additionally, they also have cancer-specific education and professional training programs. These programs are designed to enhance the expertise of their workforce, build capability in cancer prevention, treatment and care among Peter Mac's health professionals. "We have one course called oncological emergency that covers hypercalcemia, arterial obstruction and other emergencies that you are more likely to see in cancer patients than other general hospitals," Jac explains.

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Overall, Jac says that the goal of the leadership staff at Peter Mac is to up skill their health care professionals and strive to teach them more everyday. This is why there are training and education programs in place to help educate and keep the employee's skills sharp, enduring that they're capable of providing excellent care to our patients at Peter Mac.

However, besides from just catering to the skills of the staff at the hospital, Peter Mac is also dedicated to provide any support needed for all the members of their team, from leaders in care through to volunteers. Hence, this is why they have developed a People Strategy for the future which is aimed to provide the best support needed for a capable and talented cancer workforce.

The People Strategy will focus on;

- Employee retention, performance development and reward and recognition strategies.
- Ensuring employee buy-in through reinforcing the culture and attitudes needed to deliver Peter Mac's vision.
- Encourage organisation-wide collaboration by strengthening communications throughout.
- Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of their staff.



If you're interested in learning more about how Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre are working to up skill and retain their workforce to address the health care worker shortage then join Jac at the 2018 **Workforce Planning for Health** Summit.

This event, held on the 28th-29th of November at the Rydges Sydney Central brings together over 15+ experts from companies such as the Queensland Department of Health, St John of God Healthcare, Estia Health and the Australian Department of Health.

To secure your ticket to the event, and for special early bird pricing, simply fill in the registration form and email to [registration@iqpc.com.au](mailto:registration@iqpc.com.au)

**Visit the Website** or call +612 92291000 for more information.