

Collaborating for better health care

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A fresh approach to health care aimed at making traditional clinical relationships --- like those between doctors and patients --- more collaborative will soon begin a national trial in Australia.

The Collaborative Pairs program brings health providers and consumers together to develop their skills to work as a team to make a real difference to the health system.

Collaborative Pairs Australia will deliver leadership training to participants who enrol as consumer-clinician pairs in four regions and support them to implement localised health service improvement and innovation projects. Please see profiles of facilitators at: https://chf.org.au/sites/default/files/chf_cpa_facilitators.pdf

For example, a pair might elect to work together to design the specifications for a new primary mental health service that a Primary Health Network plans to commission. Others might look at ways that general practices can improve how they deliver preventative health care to patients. Another pair might work across a PHN and hospital network to improve how services are coordinated for aged care patients when they are discharged back into community care.

Australia is generally well served with leadership development opportunities for clinicians, and some options for leadership learning for consumers exist.

“The program’s point of difference is that it involves clinician-consumer pairs both as teachers of the program as well as participants who learn and implement a reform together as peers,” says Leanne Wells, Consumers Health Forum CEO.

“This approach takes advantage of the fact that consumers are well placed to identify shortcomings in health services which clinicians and service managers can seek to address.

“This approach gives great recognition to the role healthcare consumers – their advice and insights - can play in changing the system for the better.”

The Consumers Health Forum has joined with the King’s Fund of London, which has developed the Collaborative Pairs initiative in recent years, to trial it in Australia. Four Primary Health Networks in NSW and Victoria and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care are supporting CHF to undertake a national demonstration of the program over the next two years.

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In the initial stage of the trial four pairs, each comprising experienced clinicians and consumer advocates, will undergo training with the King's Fund to become the first Australians to deliver the program in Australia.

The program has drawn keen interest from well-credentialed health consumers and clinicians. The quality of the initial eight facilitators who are to undergo training bodes well for the successful delivery of the program.

Collaborative Pairs Australia is a unique opportunity to take health care forward by helping clinicians, patients and consumers to learn together to build productive relationships to improve and innovate in health and to make the best of their different roles and perspectives as a constructive force for change," Ms Wells, said.

"The 'us and them' relationship which has tended to pervade health care between those delivering care and those receiving it is changing for the better. This is the practice that Collaborative Pairs Australia seeks to change.

"We now have national standards that require health services to demonstrate how they involve patients as partners in care. Each side has much to offer the other: the clinician giving the expertise in delivering care and the consumer the experience of care itself.

"Good communication between patients and clinicians results in better outcomes, whether it be better treatment outcomes or better designed and functioning health services.

"Collaborative Pairs will help consumer leaders to form confident, constructive relationships with health care professionals and clinical leaders will learn new ways of working with consumers to tackle some of the system challenges we face.

"In Australia there are several developments in the health system where Collaborative Pairs training can make a contribution. These include the Primary Health Networks which commission local/regional services and enable a stronger role for consumer representatives; the scope for innovation in digitally-enabled healthcare delivery, and prospects of better coordinated care enabled by the Health Care Homes now being trialled," Ms Wells said.

Mark Doughty and Tricia Boyle, senior consultants at the King's Fund, who will deliver the program to the Australian pairs, say they are looking forward to working with and

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supporting CHF to deliver the Collaborative Pairs program in Australia. "This program provides a great opportunity for consumers and health and care professionals to develop their capability to work collaboratively and in partnership in order to successfully influence and shape the system of health care at national, state and regional commissioning level."

They say they have seen what it can do in England and are excited to have the opportunity to help translate this work to Australia

Once the facilitators return from the UK, they will be delivering the Collaborative Pairs Program in the 4 participating PHN regions.

Please see profiles of the Collaborative Pairs facilitators at:
https://chf.org.au/sites/default/files/chf_cpa_facilitators.pdf

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