

Using a Systems Thinking Framework for Promoting Better General Practice Management of Chronic Illness

- A questionnaire to all practices in the division will enable analysis of practice profiles, and inform the division of practice needs.
- Then, division staff will need to do individual practice visits asking – if it can be shown that employing a nurse would both improve the health of the practices patients, and be a worthwhile investment in a business sense, what would you want a nurse to do?
- If the practice remains unconvinced about the benefits of employing a nurse, division staff may like to:
 - (a) Speak to the practice manager/principal about the types of things nurses can do (EPC, health promotion, minor surgery, wound dressings, patient education re chronic illness etc) – see Australian Practice Nurse Association’s list (developed with input from the RACGP), available from GPDV; and
 - (b) Attempt to prove the business case for the employment of a nurse – see Hunter Urban Division’s excel model, and Monash division’s EPC-based study... after ascertaining the practice’s eligibility for the federal government’s practice nurse subsidy. Even without the subsidy, it can be shown that nurses are a good investment, particularly if helping to perform EPC items.
- Then, this checklist may be used to gather an understanding of the infrastructure the practice has (or needs to acquire) to support a practice nurse.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The assumption that underpins the checklist is that to better manage patient populations’ chronic illness, and to improve practice efficiency in a business sense, general practices should use a “systems thinking framework” to enable continuous quality improvement. This “systems thinking framework”, developed by Monash University, has been demonstrated to divisions at past GPDV chronic disease and nursing workshops. These presentations are available from GPDV directly, and will be available on GPDV’s website under “Nurses in General Practice”.

The “systems thinking framework” posits that there are five systems in general practice... these are outlined on the following page.

The checklist can be used to see if practices have the infrastructure to support a nurse, and show how infrastructure gaps can be filled. If practices answer “no” to the various questions on the checklist that you may wish to ask them, then follow up discussion and action may be warranted to better prepare the practice’s systems for the efficient employment of a practice nurse.

Financial Services System

Accounts
Fees
Budget
Tax

Human Resources System

Hiring
HR policies and
procedures
Job descriptions

Facilities system

Computers
Telephones
Storage
Infection control

Five Main Systems in a Practice

Clinical Services System

Medical supplies
Pathology
Equipment

Patient Services System

Patient records
Appointments
Patient Practice
Information

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
Financial Services	Fee Schedule	MBS income	- Is the practice aware of new MBS item numbers as they become available (eg: EPC item numbers)? - Is the practice aware of how to claim for the time taken when another staff member is involved in the patient consultation?		
		PIP payments	- Is the practice accredited and eligible to receive PIP? - If accredited, is the practice signed up for all incentives? If not, which ones? - Is the practice eligible for the practice nurse incentive?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
		Debt management	- Is the practice aware of the possible start-up costs for the employment of a nurse eg: (a) insurance (b) space (c) computerisation (d) equipment and supplies (e) advertising - Can the practice integrate these into the current operating budget? - Is the practice able to cover these costs and then retrieve them through improved efficiency?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
Human Resources	Policies & Procedures	Policy & procedures manual	- Do policies and procedures exist in a manual? - Are they understood and supported by all staff? - Is there a method for regularly reviewing/updating the manual?		
		Defining roles	- Are the roles of staff outlined, understood & supported? What if someone is ill or away? - Will there be adequate supervisory arrangements if a div 2 nurse is employed? More info needed? - Are there full staff and GP-nurse clinical meetings?		
		Professional Development	- Are there opportunities for up-skilling for all staff? - Is the staff roster flexible enough to allow for it?		
		Insurance	If a PN is employed, would the practice be adequately insured for their potential negligent acts?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
	The Hiring Process	Advertising	- Will advertising be read by a wide range of people – does the practice advertise in (a) Age (b) Herald Sun (c) Local press (d) Medical press (e) Division newsletters (f) Division/GPDV websites - When advertising, does the practice use a set advertising template? - Are the costs of advertising budgeted?		
		Job Descriptions	- Do they exist? - Are they comprehensive and understood by the staff and board? - Does the practice know what a nurse can/can't do?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
		Staff selection (Helps to determine job descriptions)	• Does the interviewer know what skills, experience and personal attributes they are looking for? - EPC knowledge - Practice experience - People skills - Specific disease management • Can the interviewer answer potential questions eg: starting date, length of contract, hours, salary etc? • Is previous experience as a practice nurse necessary/desirable? • Is there a contact person for further enquiries? • Is there the need for a police check?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
Facilities	Communication	Computers	• Is the practice computerised, and to what extent? • Are computers networked – able to communicate? • What hardware and software does the practice own, and what is further needed to improve practice systems? • Is there a practice patient database? • Are there: (a) recall and reminder systems? (b) Internet/intranet facilities? (c) Electronic prescribing/ referrals/ service directories? • Have staff received IM/IT training to meet the practice's needs? • Is there a laptop for PNs to use during visits? Mobile phone? • Are there adequate security / privacy systems? More information needed?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
		Telephones	- Does the phone at reception have sufficient incoming lines to cope with an extra staff member? - Is the phone at reception of an adequate model to meet the practice's needs? - How are messages relayed? Unanswered calls?		
	Physical Space	Rooms	- Is there enough space for a practice nurse? - Is there a spare treatment room?		
		Storage & Infection Control	- Does the practice have a steriliser? - Can files / equipment be readily accessed from all rooms?		
		Staff amenities	- Is there adequate parking for extra staff? - Is there room for staff to have lunch/breaks? - Is the practice knowledgeable of and adherent to workplace health & safety regulations?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
Patient Services	Patient Management	Appointments	- Who currently has the capacity to make appointments? - Would the nurse be able to make future appointments for the patients they see? - Could the appointment system incorporate disease-specific clinics? Eg: asthma clinics, immunisation clinics - Is there a recall/reminder system? - Are staff adequately trained to use the r/r system? - Are staff aware of the value of a r/r system?		
		Triage	- Does the practice have a process for triage? - How could a nurse improve this process?		
		Record storage	- Are records electronically stored in a database? - Can records be accessed quickly?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
	Information for Patients	Medical Information	- Does the practice have access to patient resources that a nurse could use? Eg: information on chronic disease management - Does the patient have access to this information over the internet or via e-mail? - Does the GP have the capacity to refer patients to additional information resources eg: internet sites, community health centres, disease-specific organisations?		
		Practice Information	Does the practice have a newsletter or website that could advertise for a nurse, or promote the nurse's services?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
Clinical Services	Medical Equipment	Type	• For diabetes: are there scales, a glucometer? • For asthma: is there a nebuliser, a peak flow meter, a spirometer, a spacer? • For immunisation: is there a vaccination fridge, sterilisation equipment? • For home visits: is there a car, laptop, doctor's bag, nurses' bag? • General: is there a sphygmomanometer, dressings, height/weight equipment? • Is appropriate seating for patients available?		
		Use of	• Can the practice define the skills needed of a nurse so that the nurse can do what the practice envisages they will do?		

SYSTEM	SUB-SYSTEMS	COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK PRACTICE	YES / NO	COMMENTS / ACTION
	Medical Supplies	Type	- For diabetes: are there glucometer sticks, U/A sticks, thumb prick needles, care plan tools, patient info sheets? - For asthma: are there bronchodilators, spirometer/peak flow mouthpieces, 3+ care plan sheets, education sheets? - For immunisation: are there the appropriate vaccinations, adrenalin, needles and syringes? - For home visits: are bags adequately supplied at all times? Is there a system for restocking them?		
	Ordering	Responsibility	- Is there an ordering system? - Who is ultimately responsible for ensuring adequate supplies?		