

Boosting health skills in rural Tasman

Targeted training focussed on areas of need in the Tasman community is helping local healthcare providers deliver better health outcomes for patients.

Primary Health Tasmania, the Tasmanian Health Service and Health Consumers Tasmania have been working with two local groups, the Tasman Voice for Health and the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group, to better understand the area's health and wellbeing needs and the services currently available.

Faced with a local shortage of medically skilled people and recruitment challenges, one of the needs identified during a community consultation process was targeted training aimed at upskilling the existing healthcare workforce.

The Tasman Clinical Services Action Group of service providers subsequently organised workforce training in areas including wound care, dementia and palliative care. The Tasman Voice for Health also organised mental health first aid training for community members.

Huon Regional Care Tasman manager Leeanne Triffitt is a member of the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group.

Several of her staff were among the 30 locals to complete the two-day Mental Health First Aid Australia training course, facilitated by mental health first aid trainer Amity Deans.



Leeanne Triffitt

"When we assess a new resident or hospital patient or community client, it's important that we're not just looking at their physical issues – their mental health is part of the whole package of caring for them," Leeanne says.

"The training has made the staff more aware, and they've been able to share a bit of what they've learned with their colleagues.

"I sent care staff as well as nursing staff to the training because it's not just up to one person to pick up on those things that are of concern, it's the whole team."

Leeanne provides frequent opportunities for her team to learn and improve their skills, so they are better prepared to meet both the current and future needs of the local community.

A group of Huon Regional Care and Tasman Medical Practice nurses completed a wound care

course, which consisted of a full day of training plus an online component facilitated by external provider The Benchmark Group.

"It was quite an intensive course covering a lot of different types of wounds, how to manage them, and the appropriate dressing for them," Leeanne says.

"We did some debriding as well for chronic wounds, and learned about gluing – which is definitely the way to go, especially in aged care.

"I've put a lot of stitches in; they're traumatic for younger people and there's not a lot of flesh to stitch for older people.

"So gluing is a really great alternative, and now all my staff can use that."

Leeanne is already seeing benefits from the training, which is leading to better results for patients.

"It has actually led us to treat skin tears in a way that allows us to observe the wound without disturbing it, and our wound healing times have greatly improved," she says.

"Staff generally just have more confidence in assessing a wound and choosing what to put on it, and in using glue instead of suturing.

"Having both the Huon Regional Care nurses and the Tasman (Medical Centre) nurses involved in the training means that two different groups who look after the same cohort of people received the same education, so they're doing the same things to support patients' wound care."

Community and aged care registered nurse Clare Turner jumped at the chance to take part in the wound care training, keen to learn anything that could help improve her skills and lead to better outcomes for local patients.

"I feel like we got a lot out of it, learning about complex wound care, assessing wounds and which products to use," she says.

"I think it's important that we keep our skills up and take advantage of any training opportunities that come along.

"A lot of the wounds we treat down here are quite straightforward or are post-op, so we've already got a plan. But occasionally we'll get an ulcer or something that isn't healing.

"It doesn't matter where you work or the volume of clients you've got, if you've got a wound that's not healing it's costly and debilitating. So it's important to

have knowledge on how to treat it or where to go if it's not getting better.

"The lady who took the training said we could contact her at any point with questions, and I think she was a great resource in that respect. Just having that feedback, being able to contact someone is fantastic.

"There is a wound care clinic in Hobart, but they're very busy and our clients often don't want to travel from Nubeena all the way up to Hobart to have a wound assessed.

"So if we are able to handle it down here, or can touch base with somebody who can give us advice, that's great for the community."

Clare recently left to embark on a mainland adventure with her family but plans to continue working in health care elsewhere, using the skills she honed on the peninsula to support a new community.

Primary Health Tasmania's Claire Prior says the workforce training opportunities are great examples of tangible actions to address needs identified by the experts – local service providers and community members.

"The saying 'you do the same things, you get the same results' was part of the thinking in coming up with solutions for some of the local workforce challenges," Claire says.

"This approach to upskilling the healthcare workforce is reaping rewards for the local community in a way that's sustainable, and will have other rural communities watching Tasman with interest." ■

Working with the Tasman community

People living in rural and remote areas often face additional barriers to effective health care.

Some factors that contribute to poor health outcomes include limited access to health services; a higher prevalence of health risks associated with socioeconomic status; and environmental conditions.

Primary Health Tasmania, the Tasmanian Health Service and Health Consumers Tasmania have been working with community members and service providers in the Tasman local government area to better understand current health and wellbeing needs and the services available. They have then worked together to come up with ways to address immediate, medium, and long-term needs and challenges.

Developing solutions with the local community and tailoring them to the local area gives them the best chance of success in the long term.

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