

Primary health care nurses as change agents: the impact of supportive partnerships

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Heart disease in Australia

Every year around
54,000
Australians suffer
a heart attack



Cardiovascular
disease affects
1 in 6 Australians



On average, heart attacks
killed 23 people every
day in 2015



Source: www.heartfoundation.org.au

How do we change this?

Detecting heart disease earlier can make a huge difference, allowing time for treatment or surgery.

The Heart Foundation's Nurse Ambassador Program enables nurses to support earlier detection and better management of cardiovascular health.

The strategy

To help improve the early detection and treatment of cardiovascular disease – as well as improve community knowledge – Country SA PHN is working with the Heart Foundation to extend its successful Nurse Ambassador Program across regional South Australia.

The Heart Foundation's Nurse Ambassador Program recognises nurses as active change agents at the local level, and provides them with the knowledge and tools to make a significant difference via workshop sessions, including behaviour change, motivational interviewing techniques and clinical updates.

Since 2004, some 225 nurses have completed the program, however regional nurses face significant difficulties in accessing it. These problems include:

- » Distances to travel
- » Regional medical practices not having the capacity to release staff for training
- » Limited professional development budgets

By providing scholarships, Country SA PHN eliminated many of these hurdles, covering a range of expenses to support their attendance. Funds are also used to allow practices to pay for replacement staff.

The outcomes

In 2017, seven Primary Health Care nurses from regional SA joined the Nurse Ambassador Program under the Country SA PHN scholarship. All stated they would not have been able to take part without the scholarship arrangement. All nurses successfully completed a workplace activity project which included:

- » A focus on the Australian Cardiovascular Risk (AR) tool for six of the nurses
- » A focus on patient education for one nurse working for the RFDS

As a result all were then able to take steps to:

- » Know their patient population
- » Identify and correct missing data (actual risk factors versus PENCAT data)
- » Develop protocols
- » Work with their practice team, including reception, practice managers, doctors, registrars and nurses
- » Use Opportunistic versus Invited screening processes
- » Screen and manage patient appropriately
- » Promote cardiovascular health via flyers, local media etc
- » Improve patient care and outcomes

"The Heart Foundation Nurse Ambassador training has given me great opportunities both professionally and personally. The workshops were engaging and relevant to my practice. Thank you to Country SA PHN for the scholarship – without financial support, my participation in the course would not be possible."

Kristie Gum
Pirrie Medical Centre, Port Pirie

Health implications

The partnership between Country SA PHN and the Heart Foundation has already delivered significant health benefits to regional South Australia.

Thanks to the sponsorship of regional nurses:

- » There has been an increase in the use and uptake of the AR tool across the regions of country SA
- » More practices are doing primary prevention work and not simply reactive acute treatment
- » Patients are being actively managed and supported to make lifestyle changes
- » Nurses are being active change agents in their practice and communities
- » Nurses are learning from each other and supporting each other
- » Regional communities are more aware of the importance of heart health

With eight nurses completing the program this year and seven having already completed it, the Country SA PHN and Heart Foundation partnership looks set to continue strengthening efforts to improve early detection and treatment of cardiovascular disease.

Country SA PHN

Country SA PHN exists to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare in South Australia.

Heart Foundation

The Heart Foundation funds life-saving heart research and works to improve heart disease prevention and care for all Australians.



Nurses attending the Heart Foundation Nurse Ambassador Program with Inara Beecher (front far right) and Sabine Drilling (back far left)