

Mater Aged Care Service

Mater Aged Care Service, in Forbes NSW, is a 36-bed nursing home that includes an 18-bed dementia specific unit. Initially operated by the Sisters of Mercy from 1978, management of the service was transferred to Catholic Health Care Services ACT & NSW (CHCS) in 2002.

The Mater has a tradition of striving for improvement in business excellence and was presented with a local business community excellence award in 2001 and 2002. The Mater was also a finalist in the Ministerial Awards for Training and Development. In 2002, the Director of Nursing was a finalist in the Ministers Awards for Excellence in Professional Excellence and received, from CHCS in 2001, an award for Contribution and Achievement to the Mater.

The Mater has a commitment to continuous improvement within and across the executive, site management and service level. Sixty-nine per cent of staff are involved in projects and improvement activities, such as workplace training and assessment, committees and audits. The home consults regularly with all stakeholders, and uses a variety of ways to gather information and give feedback to residents, relatives, staff and the community. All stakeholders are involved in the strategic planning processes and are able to assist management in reviewing the mission, vision and values, and the progress of strategic plans at various meetings and workshops. There is a strong sense of community ownership and involvement evident in the daily running of the home.

The mission of the service includes statements about collaboration and honouring and promoting reverence for life and dignity. The mission and organisational culture of wellbeing are operationalised in resident centred goals. Examples of positive results for residents arising from improvements and projects can be seen in the following initiatives.

High volunteer participation

In order to enhance and expand activities and lifestyle experiences for residents, the home has recruited 44 volunteers that provide companionship and 65 hours per week of assistance with activities. A volunteer coordinator provides formal orientation, support and ongoing training through regular volunteer meetings. This program is noteworthy in that it provides the residents with a greater choice of activities, encompassing a broad range of interests, including dancing, cooking, walks and gardening. Volunteers, staff and residents have evaluated the program and feedback is overwhelmingly positive, showing that 100 per cent of volunteers are satisfied with the program and a high resident satisfaction.

Sensory enhancement

A multi-sensory diversional therapy program was developed to stimulate and delight the various senses, using massage and various materials to stimulate touch and memories. Tapes and musical instruments are used to enable relaxation and reminiscence; herbs and aromatherapy to promote relaxation and foods to stimulate memories. Evaluation of the program in 2002 indicates that these activities can have an effect in reducing challenging behaviours. A more specific evaluation in 2003 reporting on seven residents shows that six of the 7 resident's which challenging behaviour have improved following a 20 minute program four nights a week.

Art classes

Feedback from a resident in January 2003 lead to the recruitment of an experienced local artist and the formation of a weekly art class with up to eight participants. Residents with advancing dementia participate in the class and residents, relatives and staff have been delighted with the results.

Managerial and service level initiatives across the Catholic Health Care Service group promote a positive workplace culture that aligns with the mission vision and values, and promotes, encourages and rewards staff in accordance with the groups organisational characteristics of wellbeing, meaning in the workplace, stewardship and collaboration. Some of the examples of exceptional managerial processes follow:

Staff culture surveys

In 1999, a survey on staff perceptions' of the workplace culture was conducted. Results showed that staff displayed a strong constructive culture. Analysis of the results led to the development of strategies to further develop this culture (including leadership and reward programs) to align with the mission vision and values. In 2002 staff survey results showed further growth in the constructive style, particularly in the areas of humanistic and self-actualising culture.

Spirit and Action program

Launched in July 2002, the Spirit and Action Program seeks to develop potential leaders and a workplace that is welcoming, affirming and enabling. It encourages a collaborative approach by staff and management, to create better workplaces and promote a spiritual dimension. The program of a 12-month program of workshops, action learning and reflection, aiming at personal and professional change to achieve better leadership.

Increased training budget

The Mater has a long history of valuing staff training and development and sees this as an investment, rather than an expense. An aged care survey of 25 homes in 1999/2000 shows that the average spent on training was 18 cents per bed per day. The Mater committed and spent 83 cents per bed day in 1999/2000 and has continued to commit funding up to three times the national average. The Mater's commitment and leadership in training was recognised by the invitation for the director of nursing to join the Aged Care Workforce Committee into recruitment and retention of nurses in 2002. Assessment of staff competencies in 2003 across the CHCS group, shows that the Mater staff competency performance was 90.5 per cent. Residents and relatives comment very positively on staff skills and knowledge.

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