


Chapter 5. Potential responses to health care complexity

Complexity impacts on patients, services, patient-practitioner relationships, the role of practitioners, the type of skills and reasoning required, and the nature of training and education necessary to develop those skills. Given the 'wicked' nature of health care complexity, it is unsurprising that attempts to create over-arching 'one size fits all' solutions have not succeeded (Woods, Patterson, & Cook, 2008) and that, in general, top-down attempts to exert control over or regulate complex systems have not led to positive outcomes (Baxter, 2010). Having identified key concerns and challenges relating to complexity, potential responses can now be considered.





In light of the concerns and challenges described in previous chapters, this chapter links ClinEdQ functions and capacities with potential responses to health care complexity (see Figure 4) thus:

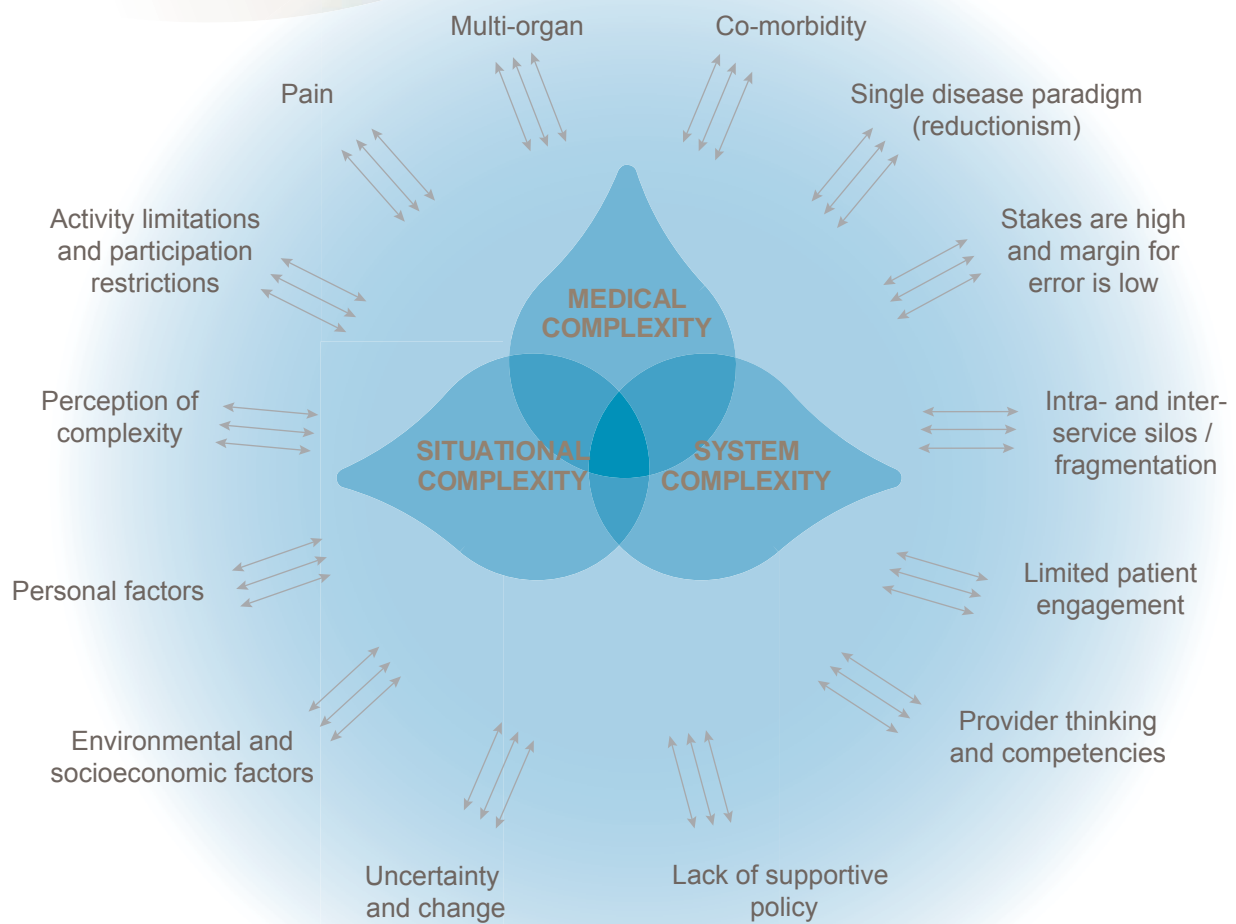
- Recognising the role of ClinEdQ to build clinical education by advancing a multi-professional perspective, **learning and training responses** to health care complexity are identified.
- Noting the ClinEdQ priority to coordinate and facilitate innovation and collaboration between stakeholders across the clinical professions, education and health service providers **collaboration-oriented responses** to health care complexity are outlined.
- Responding to the ClinEdQ focus on achieving improvements in the capacity and quality of care in Queensland Health, **care-oriented responses** to complexity are proposed.
- Acknowledging the ClinEdQ emphasis on practical strategies, workforce responsiveness and facilitation of clinical development and knowledge management across the clinical professions, **practical examples** currently employed actions that may be further optimised in the response to complexity are presented (Appendix 2).

Learning-oriented responses:

- Reflective practice
- Clinical reasoning and evidence-based practice
- Case-based learning and problem-solving
- Experiential Learning
- Equipping providers - Capability
- Equipping teams to respond to health care complexity
- Organisational learning through Quality Improvement
- Organisational learning through research

Collaboration-oriented responses:

- Inter-professional/practitioner collaboration
- Collaborative teams (Communities of practice)
- Inter-sectoral collaboration
- Collaborative policy development



Care-oriented responses:

- Informed and active patients and consumers
- Interpersonal processes of care
- Integrated / coordinated care

Some local practical responses:

- Workforce flexibility
- Extending scope of practice
- Consultant & case management approaches
- Workforce education
- Technological approaches
- Training health care practitioners
- Reconceptualising outcomes
- Resilience

Figure 4: Responses to factors associated with health care complexity

Reflective practice

The tendency and ability to reflect, and the processes used to do so, are highly variable across individual health care professionals (Mann, et al., 2009), however reflection facilitates practitioners to explore new possibilities when dealing with complexity. Reflective practice enables health care practitioners to gain meaning from complex clinical problems and situations (Mann, et al., 2009). Schön's reflective practitioner and Kolb's experiential learning models⁹ are examples of reflective strategies that enable practitioners to constructively contend with health care complexity. Such strategies are based on the understanding that health practitioner practice is largely based upon tacit knowledge that becomes established as practice becomes more stable and routine. Over time practitioners become selectively inattentive to phenomena that do not fit the established categories and miss opportunities to think innovatively about what they are doing.

In contrast, 'reflective practitioners' notice emerging phenomena that challenge their existing categories and concepts. They have the skills to define a problem within the dynamics of the situation and identify (a) the decisions to be made, (b) the ends to be achieved, and (c) the means to be chosen (Mamede & Schmidt, 2004). By analysing previous decisions, considering scenarios and examining consequences, reflective practitioners consider new alternatives (Mamede & Schmidt, 2004). Such strategies emphasize the role that experience plays in the process of learning (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999) and contribute to adaptive processes of thinking, enabling successful negotiation of complex and changeable environments (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Reflective practice can assist health care practitioners to understand not only their own experiences and responses, but also those of their patients who are living with complex health care issues (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Clinical reasoning and evidence-based practice

Evidence-based practice is frequently promoted as a means of responding to health care complexity by improving outcomes for discrete medical conditions and fostering standardisation of practice (Leff et al., 2009). However, only a fraction of current research is designed in such a manner that it will provide evidence that might change practice (Glasziou, et al., 2011), and even a smaller portion is relevant to complex health care settings (Greig, Entwistle, & Beech, 2011). The assumptions that evidence for best practice should be determined through reductionist methods, that best practice can be applied across multiple individuals in diverse settings, or that imported solutions can be translated across complex healthcare settings, have recently been questioned (Greig, et al., 2011).

Likewise, the application of evidence-based practice in health care complexity is akin to using 'authoritative strategies' to resolve wicked problems (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). Although credible in themselves, efficient and often timely, authoritative strategies are also commonly overly narrow in

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application and disconnected from eventual outcomes and consequences (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). As practitioners seek to respond to complex and wicked health issues, they are usually faced with ambiguous situations in which there is no clear 'best' solution, and in which the potential to rely on evidence-based decision-making is limited or even non-existent (Molleman, et al., 2008). In situations such as these, too great a reliance on guidelines and protocols will not be constructive (Abbasi, 2005).

Health care complexity highlights the need to balance consistent and generic evidence-based guidelines with the need to respond to the unique requirements of each situation. Beyond a strong evidence foundation, decision making and reasoning in situations of complexity requires capacity for coping with uncertainty, ability to incorporate multiple perspectives and trans-disciplinary approaches, and awareness of the wide variety of personal and environmental factors that surround each person (Lessard, 2007).

Clinical reasoning is a cognitive process that supports a holistic response by health care practitioners, enabling them to take 'wise' action by considering the contexts and circumstances of their patients (Higgs & Jones, 2008). Clinical reasoning is one way of making implicit knowledge more explicit, and occurs as a result of input from multiple sources, including other practitioners, patients and family members. For present purposes, it is noteworthy that clinical reasoning which is applied as a form of collaborative, reflective practice is akin to the collaborative strategies outlined as the most effective for dealing with wicked problems (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007).

Recognition that clinical reasoning is derived, in part, from experience and ongoing reflection necessitates human resource management processes that can foster and maintain experiential 'wisdom' within the health workforce (Baxter, Blackburn, Hussey & Nicklin, 2009). Retaining experienced health care practitioners who are capable of exercising reflective reasoning and working at the full scope of their professional qualifications is an additional consideration in responding to health care complexity.

⁹ <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/reflecti.htm>

Case-based learning and problem-solving

Although many health care practitioners are adequately trained and have the capacity to solve complex problems within their sphere of training, they are less able to develop solutions when faced with complex problems that extend beyond the limits of that sphere (Barach & Johnson, 2006). A number of strategies can be employed to promote creative problem-solving and innovation in health care. First, there is evidence that case presentation and role plays are useful strategies; stories and cases aid the memorization of clinical knowledge more effectively than learning discrete facts (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001). Exposure to appropriately complex case histories with multiple acceptable solutions (Cook et al., 2008) builds the capacity of health care practitioners to respond to complex situations in future. Similarly, simulations using modelling of complex situations to provide practice in unfamiliar contexts (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001), with repeated experiences and evaluations over time (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007) are useful. Case-based rather than concept-based discussions are beneficial (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007; Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001), presumably because this approach encourages the integration of multiple concepts.

Second, research indicates that problem-solving capacity can be enhanced through capability training which is focussed on teamwork and collaboration, building awareness of one's individual problem-solving style, and fostering an appreciation of the styles of other team members (Treffinger, Selby, & Isaksen, 2007). This approach emphasises the need for small group, problem-based

learning, in which case histories are used as a basis for the co-creation of treatment plans (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001). By combining case-based learning and capability training, interventions can bring about integration both at the individual level, and across disciplines.

Experiential learning is an effective vehicle for promoting the working knowledge (i.e., the 'how to') that is implicit in developing and maintaining a capable health care workforce (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007). In light of the ambiguity associated with health care complexity, health care practitioners benefit from educational experiences that are reflective of real life contexts. Opportunities need to be created whereby health care practitioners can experience new ways of working, observe the outcomes, reflect on the experience and build their capability to respond to health care complexity (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007).

The principles of experiential learning favour a focus on expert coaching rather than knowledge transfer from experts, and an emphasis on the acquisition of reflective skills rather than the memorization of content (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007). Thus, the capacity for reflection is an essential element of experiential learning and reflective practice is mediated by collaboration with others who have similar goals (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001).

Equipping providers to respond to health care complexity - capability

Within this uncertain, evolving environment, the need for health care practitioners to develop capability as well as competence is crucial (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001). Competence is understood as involving conceptual knowledge ('knowing that'), whereas capability implies the acquisition of working knowledge ('knowing how') (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007). This ability to modify behaviours based on experiences, or 'transformational learning', enables individuals to adapt to or co-evolve with new situations, thereby supporting the transition from individual competence to personal capability (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001). Implicit in the notion of capability is the individuals' ability to create new knowledge, to adapt existing knowledge, to engage in continuous improvement through reflection, and to be flexible to change (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001).

The ability to think creatively is seen as an effective response to health care complexity, both as a function of the problem-solving process (Mumford & Baughman, 1995; Runco, 2004) and as a component of flexibility (Flach, 1990). It encompasses processes such as analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and the transformation of information to create new knowledge (Runco, 2004). Creative thinking can be defined as 'the connecting and rearranging of knowledge in the minds of persons who allow themselves to think flexibly to generate new ideas (Plsek, 1999). This style of thinking is characterised by free-flowing problem-solving where many solutions are possible. This ability affords practitioners the capacity to cope with changes inherent in complex systems such as health systems (Runco, 2004).

Equipping teams to respond to health care complexity

The notion of capability applies not just to individuals, but also to teams of health care practitioners, who are required to collaboratively resolve complex problems and design care strategies. Soubhi and colleagues (2010) described the need for 'collective capability', which refers to the ability of health care practitioners to learn from each other when collectively solving complex problems (Soubhi, et al., 2010). Implicit in this notion is an acknowledgement of the emergent knowledge created when teams of health care practitioners collaborate over time. Training for capability is not limited to formal educational contexts, but should be an ongoing goal within work environments and a tenet of ongoing professional education.

Organisational learning through Quality Improvement

Traditional approaches to quality improvement can be quite rigid, so patterns which might lead to new insights often go unrecognised (Leviton, 2011). What is needed to meet the challenges associated with health care complexity is an innovative new approach to quality improvement that accommodates unpredictability and variety, in which practitioners are free to use their ingenuity to address quality improvement problems (Leviton, 2011).

One example of such an approach is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle of quality improvement, which can be used to understand and deal with aspects of complexity. PDSA has been used by teams of health care practitioners to longitudinally and iteratively create cycles of rapid improvement in managing chronic illnesses (see, for example, Glasgow et al., 2002; Wagner, 2004). PDSA is a scientific method for implementing and testing the effects of change on performance within the health care system (Speroff, James, Nelson, Headrick, & Brommels, 2004). This approach may be appropriate for assisting groups of health care practitioners to participate in, reflect on and experientially learn from activities that aim to respond to health care complexity (Walley & Gowland, 2004).

When used as an organisational review strategy across an entire service, these approaches can inform and improve organisational responses to health care complexity. However, if used in a short-term or superficial way, they will likely be insufficient and ineffective to achieve organisational learning (Mowles, et al., 2010).

Organisational learning through research

As with practitioner concerns over evidence based practice, it appears that many health care practitioners feel constrained by research that does not acknowledge health care complexity (Leviton, 2011). When research is defined by narrow limitations, excludes multiple conditions, or fails to engage patients and the complex variables that impact on them, its' capacity to address complexity is equally limited (Fortin et al., 2006).

In contrast, useful paradigms which accommodate complex health care needs of individuals are now entering the mainstream (Scuffham, Nikles, Mitchell, Yelland, Vine, Poulos et al, 2010). In a recent local example, Scuffham and colleagues found that they could achieve cost savings when they sought to identify optimal treatment in patients for whom disease management was uncertain. Their design accommodated patient perceptions and values, and supported patients and doctors to persist with optimal treatment. By conducting research as a collaborative process, engaging patients in the process, they found that patients were more likely to adhere to treatment, to gain a greater understanding of their disease (and the treatment), and have an improved relationship with their healthcare practitioner.

To develop a research agenda that addresses health care complexity, the choice of methodology, topic and the breadth of research should be carefully selected to be consistent with the key issues. Based on our review, research goals should include:

- Building collaboration, and co-opting health care practitioners and patients as researchers (de Jonge, et al., 2006; Edgren, 2008; Fortin, et al., 2007; Mowles, et al., 2010).
- Using a methodology which can deal with complex environments (for example, drawing from Complex Adaptive Systems methods, Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001).
- Seeking clarity about the nature of social and other contexts and their effect on health outcomes.

Collaboration-oriented responses to health care complexity

Inter-professional/practitioner collaboration

Interdisciplinary or inter-professional collaboration specifically describes cooperation amongst health care practitioners from different disciplines. Because of the multiple dimensions of medical and social factors present, the array of professional disciplines involved, and the workforce factors, problem-focussed and patient-focussed inter-professional collaboration, is a highly important mechanism for responding to health care complexity (Petri, 2010).

There is an assumption within inter-professional collaboration that 'the achievement of desired outcomes would not be possible if each discipline was acting independently' (Petri, 2010, p. 76). It involves shared objectives, mutual responsibility, collective ownership of goals and shared decision-making (Petri, 2010), but with a degree of professional independence (Gray, 1989, cited in Kinnaman & Bleich, 2004).



Collaborative teams (Communities of practice)

Consistent with issues raised in the previous section, another mechanism for responding to health care complexity is to engage key individuals in collective learning and action. Such teams or 'communities of practice' can be defined as 'a group of people who share a passion about a topic, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, 2002 cited in Soubhi, et al., 2010). Active communities of practice can inform strategy, solve problems, transfer best practices, and develop practitioner skills (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Within health care, they can contribute to defining common goals, co-creating care plans, and engaging in reflective learning (Soubhi, et al., 2010).

In addition to including practitioners from disparate disciplines, communities of practice should recognise patients and families as a vital part of the care team. In a team, patients and family members can support treatment programmes and add to collective knowledge about patient care (Soubhi, 2007). However recognising the potential for boundaries to form when individuals from different professional and socio-cultural perceptions come together (Dopson & Fitzgerald, 2006), managers should adopt a problem-solving, goal oriented approach, and emphasise reflection. They should support the development of a common space and time (on-line or in person), promote the understanding that patient and family member perceptions are part of clinical care, and use narrative to communicate and share knowledge (Robinson & Cottrell, 2005).

Inter-sectoral collaboration

Inter-sectoral collaboration has been identified as crucial in the response to wicked or complex health problems, since by definition, these problems cannot be effectively addressed in isolation or within a single sector (Bilodeau, De, Andrade, Bareta, & et al., 2005). Inter-sectoral collaboration can be as straightforward as sharing information or as advanced as the development of joint intervention programmes or strategic frameworks. It can occur at planning and strategic levels, policy level, in service delivery, in monitoring and in research. The common factor, however, is recognition that complex health issues

require collaboration across traditional boundaries to achieve common goals that would otherwise have been difficult or impossible to achieve.

Effective inter-sectoral collaboration depends on: supportive structures and processes, supportive culture and skills base, common goals, appropriate budget and accountability mechanisms (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007; New Zealand Ministry of Health, undated). It also depends in large part on information management systems that support cross boundary working, since shared information leads to innovation (Bilodeau, et al., 2005).

Although the benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration appear clear, it is also time consuming and transaction costs are high. As a result, and often due to lack of management support, many collaborative initiatives dissipate within the first two years (New Zealand Ministry of Health, undated). The evidence that collaborative initiatives can address complexity remains limited, largely due to the difficulties associated with measuring such initiatives. Recognising that complex health issues span numerous sectors, this would appear to be a high priority for future research.

Care-oriented responses to health care complexity

In order to respond appropriately to complexity in a way that reduces rather than increases the impact of these factors on individual health outcomes, it is essential that the care delivery system is characterised by individuals, relationships and networks that can accommodate complexity. These characteristics are usually associated with the level of understanding and engagement among individuals involved in the processes that define the relationship, and the coordination that exists between stakeholders.

For patients with complex care needs, inter-professional collaboration is associated with more responsive and timely services (Brown, Tucker, & Domokos, 2003; Coxon, 2005; Scragg, 2006), improved access and better information exchanges (Brown, et al., 2003). For health professionals, collaboration is associated with increased job satisfaction, greater team working, development of a shared culture, improved communication, and enhanced cooperation with other agencies (Coxon, 2005; Hultberg, Glendinning, Allebeck, & Lönnrothet, 2005), all of which are vital in the response to complexity. From a staff development perspective, when collaboration results in establishing agreed roles and responsibilities, it can alleviate conflict (Hudson, 2005; Stewart, Petch, & Curtice, 2003), and improve understanding of other disciplines (Scragg, 2006).

Despite these benefits, inter-professional collaboration remains limited in practice and many patients experience resulting sub-optimal outcomes (Schoen et al., 2004 cited in McDonald, et al., 2009). Acknowledging that this is partially due to management difficulties in working with multifaceted teams (Wagner, 2000), it is evident that deliberate and active management support is required.

Effective collaboration stems from successful inter-practitioner education, appropriate role awareness, and interpersonal relationship skills (Petri, 2010). It requires the clarification of roles, and the investment of required resources (Campbell & McLaughlin, 2000). Ongoing maintenance of collaboration requires clear standards for measuring the effectiveness of integrated teams and attention to reflective analysis (Bronstein, 2003).

Informed and active patients and consumers

It is within the relationship established in the clinical encounter that health care practitioners are able to shape (positively or negatively) the ability of individuals to respond to complexities associated with their health (Shim, 2010). Beyond the influence that health care practitioners have over patients, their level of medical knowledge, skills, and attitudes significantly affect the quality of their clinical encounter (Shim, 2010). It is vital that health care practitioners recognise and respond to the interaction within the patient encounter in a way that most actively informs and engages patients in complex health care. In instances where health literacy is poor, patients are less knowledgeable about health, receive less preventive care, have worse chronic illness control, poorer physical and mental health function and have higher emergency department and hospital utilisation (Hibbard, Peters, Dixon, & Tusler, 2007). They are typically not provided with optimal care, which in turn affects outcomes (Shim, 2010). The resulting disengagement of patients is exacerbated because practitioners are less likely to appreciate the complexity of their circumstances and respond appropriately, resulting in further disadvantage (Shim, 2010).

In contrast, in addition to the informational and self management benefits of their engagement, engaged patients are rewarded through informative and supportive interactions with health care practitioners (Street, et al., 2005). Informed and active patients, in combination with proactive health care teams, are central to a model of health care that can appropriately respond to health care complexity

(Wagner, et al., 2001). Informed and active patients require information about their health care, the skills to access and apply the information, and the confidence to continue to access and apply that information and those skills (Wagner, et al., 2001). Health literacy, self-management support, motivation, goal-setting, and decision making are important for enabling patients to become informed and active.

Health literacy is foundational to each of these concepts because it relates to the ability to access, interpret and make decisions based on information, make sound health decisions and assume greater responsibility for health care (Peerson & Saunders, 2009). In the context of complexity, health literacy is essential for understanding and acting on information and instructions from health practitioners, seeking additional information, and sharing in decision-making (Peerson & Saunders, 2009). While it is true that health literacy is heavily influenced by fixed realities such as the patient's background and their prior learning opportunities (Paasche-Orlow & Wolf, 2010), it is also influenced by the social capital emerging from the health care encounter (Hawe & Shiell, 2000; Shortt, 2004; Shim, 2010). Health care practitioners can therefore provide interpersonal support for health enhancing behaviour, health-related knowledge and the ability to access services (World Bank Group, 2011; Abel, 2008).

Self-management is a key component of many models of complex and chronic care, and is a priority in almost every call for care reform. However, the mechanisms involved in delivering the necessary supports to promote self-management are poorly understood (Thorne, Paterson, & Russell, 2003). Self management involves engaging in processes that foster people's opportunities to apply problem-solving skills, experience self-efficacy and apply their knowledge in real-life situations (Coleman & Newton, 2005). It is based on information provision, skill development, collaborative planning and goal setting.

Goal setting is a complementary strategy that can assist patients to respond to complex health issues (Bodenheimer, Lorig, Holman, & Grumbach, 2002; Funnell & Anderson, 2005; Langford, Sawyer, Gioimo, Brownson, & O'Toole, 2007; Lorig &

Holman, 2003). Goal setting enhances rapport, and builds alliances, motivation and coordination (Wade, 2009), as well as improving the quality of health information that is shared during the exchange (Schulman-Green et al., 2005).

Interpersonal processes of care

In the context of health care, there is a need to match case complexity (e.g., morbidity, symptoms, contextual realities, etc.) with comprehensive care (which includes appropriate processes of care) (de Jonge, et al., 2006, Bayliss 2003 cited in Fortin, et al., 2007). There is also a need for high quality and integrated interaction between the health care practitioner and the patient.



An appropriate response to complexity includes greater 'congruence' in the patient-practitioner relationship (Safford et al., 2007), such as that described in 'person-centred practice' (Mead & Bower, 2000). This includes:

- an openness to the moving beyond physical problems, including to develop a full understanding of the patient's personal experience and meaning that is attributed to illness,
- a willingness to share power and responsibility,
- the building of an emotional context within which motivation, understanding and confidence can be fostered, and
- a recognition of the importance of self-awareness in their interactions with people who have complex health-related needs.

Such an approach recognises the reciprocal influence of patients and health care practitioners upon each other. It is based on an understanding that health care practitioners can induce certain kinds of patient behaviour, and substantially contribute to the patient's capacity to deal with the complex reality of their health issues (Turco, et al., 2009).

As reflected in figures 1 and 2, it is in the interactions between illness, personal and environmental factors (or medical, situational and systems domains), that health care complexity resides. Understanding and incorporating such factors requires partnership with the patient. The implications of this reality are that the interpersonal processes which characterise the clinical or hospital encounter require a new set of skills

and shared goals (communication skills, building partnership and trust, and an interpersonal style which promotes collaborative decision making).

Integrated / co-ordinated care

Responding to health care complexity by minimising fragmentation through the coordination and integration of health care services is widely regarded as a key strategy for increasing effectiveness of care, reducing costs, and optimising patient outcomes (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010). These models focus on issues such as process management and workflow. Examples of integrated services include strategies such as co-locating health and social care teams in a specific neighbourhood, or developing city wide services to address specific health issues through dedicated lead workers (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010).

In keeping with other responses identified in this review, the literature indicates that successful integrated care requires:

- Policy level initiatives, that include (a) co-location of services (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002; Leutz, 1999; Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Powell Davies et al., 2006), (b) pooled budgets to facilitate working across agency boundaries, and (c) inter-sectoral planning, and transparent governance arrangements (Irving, Dobkin, & Park, 2009; Keast, Mandell, Brown, & Woolcock, 2004; Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Minkman, Ahaus, Fabbrocotti, Nabitz, & Huijsman, 2009).
- Management commitment and support, which includes (a) leaders with a clear vision of integrated care (Ouwens, Wollersheim, Hermens, Hulscher, & Grol, 2005), (b) support for teamwork (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002; Minkman, et al., 2009), and (c) joint care planning (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002).
- Development of shared culture and purpose (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Ouwens, et al., 2005), as well as a clear understanding of roles and tasks (Minkman, et al., 2009; Ouwens, et al., 2005).

- Effective knowledge sharing through information systems (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010), and common decision-support tools (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002).
- Professional development (Ouwens, et al., 2005).
- Regular patient/family contact and ongoing support (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002), and a patient-centred approach (Minkman, et al., 2009; Powell Davies, et al., 2006; Suter, Oelke, Adair, & Armitage, 2009).

An example of an integrated care approach is the Chronic Care Model (CCM) (Wagner, et al., 2001; Barr et al., 2003) which seeks to integrate the elements of the health care organisation, self-management support, decision support, delivery system design, clinical information systems, as well as community resources and policies (Barr, et al., 2003; Swerissen & Taylor, 2008; Wagner, et al., 2001). While not widely adopted in practice (Coxon, 2005), the CCM seeks to create productive interactions and relationships between prepared proactive teams and informed activated patients (Barr, et al., 2003; Wagner, et al., 2001).



Chapter 6. Conclusion: Implications for skill development and training

Complexity is a vital consideration for the future of health care, and specifically for the clinical education of current and future practitioners. The health care provided by practitioners and systems is limited by current conceptualisations and understandings of complexity. This review has identified the ICF as a potential framework for interpreting health care complexity in a meaningful way. It has also underscored the importance of recognising different dimensions of health care complexity, and noted the 'wicked' nature of interactions between these dimensions. It has suggested that health care practitioners and health care systems need to find new ways of responding to the wicked problem of health care complexity.

This review has described elements of the extent of medical complexity, noting an array of types of medical complexity, numerous complex conditions and the way interactions between conditions further amplify complexity. Noting that medical complexity is only one aspect of complexity in health care, the review has emphasised two further dimensions which substantially contribute to the degree of wickedness of these issues. Situational complexity (environmental, personal, and participation factors) and health care system complexity (including fragmentation, service silos, lack of patient engagement, and related factors) interact with medical complexity in unique ways.

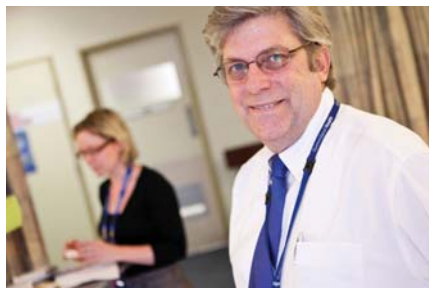
In recognising health care complexity as a wicked problem, this review has emphasised that behavioural change will be part of the solution, and that collaborative strategies will be vital to achieving sustainable change. The review has highlighted that a response to complexity will also include assisting individuals, groups of health care professionals (e.g., multidisciplinary groups or narrowly focussed teams of health care professionals), or specific providers of health care (e.g., tertiary health care providers) to move beyond their traditional scope of experience and practice. Developing solutions at multiple levels of health care provision, in multiple policy domains and across multiple levels of government will be key, though it is likely to be complicated by conflicting policy objectives and disagreement among stakeholders regarding the appropriateness of proposed solutions.

The review notes that engaging multiple stakeholders in developing solutions will be essential to ensure that knowledge, rather than mere information, is transferred between stakeholders in a way that allows problem-solving strategies to be employed to address issues comprehensively, rather than from the perspectives of one individual. Thus, an important response to dealing with the wicked problem of health care complexity is to adopt a purposeful, reflective approach to professional practice that increases the capacity of health care professionals to collaborate with multiple stakeholders across the multiple levels of care.

The implications for education and training, which are noted at a number of points throughout this review include:

- The importance of fostering skills for reflective practice.
- Recognition of the place of clinical reasoning as core to evidence based practice.
- The importance of equipping providers and teams through capability training, case based learning and problem solving, as well as by prioritising appropriate quality improvement and research paradigms which address issues relating to complexity.

- The central importance of training and equipping health practitioners, managers and policy makers in collaboration at many levels (inter-professional collaboration, team collaboration and particularly inter-sectoral collaboration).
- The foundational importance of new approaches to patient care which address some of the consequences of complexity (fostering health literacy, self management and goal setting to assist patients to become informed and engaged in health care, building interpersonal skills to promote partnership with patients, and applying relevant models of integrated and coordinated care to address fragmentation at the patient level).



Chapter 7.

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Appendix 1. **Search terms**

Complexity OR Complex condition
OR Complex patients OR aComplex
healthcare OR Complex needs

AND/OR

Comorbidity

Multimorbidity

Frailty

Chronic disease AND Determinants of
health

Health AND Complex AND Social AND
Isolation

Cultural AND Capital AND Health

Complex AND Health AND Geography

Organisation OR Organization AND Silo

Social environments

Ethnicity

Socio-ecological model

Social norms

Coping behaviour

Health/care seeking behaviour

Decision-making

Integrated care OR Integration

Collaboration OR Intersectoral
collaboration OR Multidisciplinary OR
Interdisciplinary

Provider OR Service OR Allied Health

Resources OR Skills OR Capacity

Training AND Education

Challenges OR Barriers

Appendix 2. Practical workforce implications and examples that may be co-opted in response to health care complexity

Some of the responses identified in this report imply major changes in framework and ethos in order to respond to complexity. While the extent and influence of complexity in health care is such that it warrants a significant shift in health practitioner workforce, services, roles, skills and training, the response will obviously occur at many different levels and in many ways. Nevertheless, several strategies and actions are currently being successfully employed for managing complexity in a variety of settings within Queensland Health.

Some specific examples include the following:

- There are a number of current projects aimed at 'sharing and developing unique [service] solutions.....throughout the State', which while strongly driven by workforce issues (productivity, retention) are underpinned by the notion of improved patient outcomes.
- Complexities associated with chronicity of health problems and service delivery requirements are recognised as factors contributing to the need for change in the current Nursing and Midwifery Models of Care Project.
- Shifts towards the introduction of intermediate level health practitioners (such as the expanded use of Allied Health Assistants), and shifts in skills mix, are intended to enable advanced health practitioners to respond to more complex health concerns.
- Mental health care in general is strongly focused on complexity with numerous mental health service

enhancements outlined in the latest Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007 – 2017 (Queensland Health 2008). These include ‘Service Integration Coordinator’ positions, and emphasis on supporting those with complex needs in the community and a focus on inter-sectoral collaboration.

- The Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) is currently conducting a state-wide, database oriented project, exploring dimensions of complexity in their patient group and identifying key factors.

However, there are also a number of other broad strategies which relate to the workforce concerns of ClinEdQ, which may be relevant as strategies in the response to complexity (see Figure 4).

Workforce flexibility

The existing roles of health care practitioners have evolved historically and are oriented to standardisation (treatment regimes, meal times, doctor’s rounds, and staff shift times). Although logical, this approach impedes flexibility. In order to manage complexity, the workforce must be able to respond flexibly to individual patient health care needs. In Queensland Health, as in other departments, incremental workforce reform and innovation is ongoing, towards a more flexible and functional workforce that is better equipped to cope with complexity. A key concern in this reform is ensuring that relevance to complexity remains a central concern.

Extending scope of practice

Supporting health care practitioners to practice to full scope is one means of increasing the capacity of the workforce to deal with health care complexity. The approach, currently being implemented in many contexts in Queensland Health, recognises that more highly educated and experienced health care practitioners should deal with the more complex clinical questions whilst junior health care practitioners and support staff should focus on the more routine work (Schluter, Seaton, & Chaboyer, 2011). In order for health care practitioners to work at full scope and

address complexity more adequately, they must relinquish routine tasks. However not all health care practitioners necessarily aspire to, nor are they suited to dealing with health care complexity (Australian Capital Territory Health, 2009). Workforce structures which adequately reward and support those who deal with health care complexity, but also allow them to work to their ability are required.

Broadening evidence based practice

As noted above, a holistic response to complexity requires health care practitioners to consider multiple perspectives and options in diagnosis and treatment planning, to adopt a collaborative approach and to seek individualised, rather than blanket solutions (Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001).

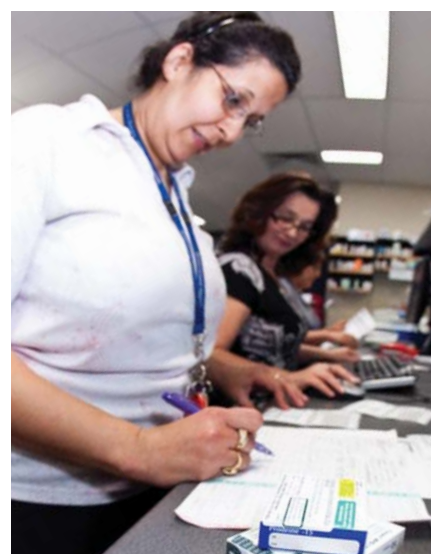
Within Queensland Health such strategies are currently being investigated and applied with the emerging ‘ACE’ approach (Action based on Clinical reasoning and Evidence approach) being proposed by ClinEdQ (Allied Health). For such strategies to be viable, all practitioners should be exposed to reflective learning through inquiry, and provided with frameworks for doing so.

Consultant approaches

The expert health care practitioner, who specialises, or super-specialises in a certain diagnostic area seeks to manage complexity through detailed knowledge derived from repetition and volume of patients in their specialist area. Whilst this might be beneficial for the few patients with access to the super-specialist, it is not a model which is scalable to meet all patients’ needs. Alternatively models of practice being applied in Queensland Health and elsewhere, include a consultant specialist and skilled generalist practitioners who are able to gain advice, build skills, and manage condition-specific complexity (Cox, Amsters, & Pershouse, 2001) This however is only useful to the extent that generalists can apply this to the context of their own practice and that of their patients (Cox, et al., 2001).

Case management approaches

In some models (including in Queensland Health ambulatory care settings), a more holistic case management approach has been adopted to manage complexity (Ishani et al., 2011; Sinha, Bessman, Flomenbaum, & Leff, 2011). The oversight role of the case manager helps to overcome the siloed nature of health care provision. Patients with multiple issues and multiple providers have at least one health care practitioner who is abreast of their complex condition and circumstances and can coordinate care, and also advocate for the patient as they navigate the complexities of the health care system.



¹⁰ Queensland Health Electronic Publishing Service <http://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/ocno/content/mnm.htm>

¹¹ http://www.health.qld.gov.au/cunninghamcentre/html/ah_prof_support.asp

Workforce education

Despite concerted attempts to introduce interdisciplinary concepts and content into the programmes of undergraduate health care practitioners (Cleak & Williamson, 2007; Philippon, Pimlott, King, Day, & Cox, 2005), training is still predominantly conducted in professional silos (Newhouse & Spring, 2010). This adversely impacts upon the ability of young practitioners to think broadly and to appreciate the skills of practitioners from other disciplines in tackling complexity.

It also indicates that inter- and trans-disciplinary capability must be taught on-the-job. This might be best achieved through role modelling and mentoring. While mentoring approaches are mostly conceptualised as one-to-one, it is evident that where health care practitioners work in functional, robust multidisciplinary teams, they can develop depth of understanding of the attributes of practitioners from other disciplines. This may be key to improving outcomes in cases of complexity. In Queensland there are a number of initiatives which are consistent with this approach. The emphasis on peer group supervision and mentoring in a number of settings is noteworthy in this regard, as is some advanced clinical skill training.

Technological approaches

There is clearly some promise in the use of technology to address aspects of health care complexity. For example, electronic decision support systems assist with health-related decision making, and can assist in the context of health care complexity (Abbasi, 2005). As these support systems become more accessible and provide health care practitioners with concise, evidence-based, up-to-date information, and—crucially— as they incorporate individualized and contextually relevant information, they will become increasingly useful (Abbasi, 2005).

From a staff training perspective, virtual patient strategies have the potential to introduce health care practitioners to many of the dimensions of complexity in health care. Such approaches hold promise as tools that can support integrated care, inter-professional collaboration, reflective practice and active patient participation.

Likewise, individualised electronic patient records provide an opportunity to record and integrate information, enhance inter-professional practice around complex medical conditions and ensure that pathways and treatments are optimised. Within a service or region, these records can be used to develop contextually specific service models that enable both health care practitioners and policy makers to depict, analyse, evaluate and reflect on a wide array of factors impacting on health care complexity.

From a staff training perspective, virtual patient strategies (including those currently being researched in Queensland Health by team members (Kuipers, 2011), have the potential to introduce health care practitioners to many of the dimensions of complexity in health care. Such approaches hold promise as tools that can support integrated care, inter-professional collaboration, reflective practice and active patient participation. However, if used inappropriately, they can also contribute to reductionist tendencies of health care systems that may hinder effective responses to health care complexity.

Training health care practitioners

Clinical education and training will have a fundamental role in enabling the health practitioner workforce to respond to health care complexity. It will be crucial to new roles that will emerge in response to complexity, to the expansion of existing roles or to the adoption of new approaches such as trans-disciplinary practice. Reiterating many of the themes identified in this report, such training will:

- Reinforce communication skills and active listening skills (McCormack, 2003), build capability for patient partnerships and participatory management planning (Von Korff, Gruman, Schaefer, Curry, & Wagner, 1997), and promote interpersonal styles which incorporate collaborative decision making (Price, 2006).
- Foster flexibility as a key feature of practitioner practice (Duckett, 2008).
- Enhance health care practitioner capability rather than training for narrow competencies (fostering reflection for practice improvement, and the ability for integrative, collaborative working (Batalden & Davidoff, 2007; Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001; Plsek, 1999).
- Utilise transformational learning (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001) through adapting existing competencies to a new situation with different types of input.
- Promote relational learning (Fraser & Pakenham, 2008) through emphasising relationships between parts, making conceptual links between areas which appear unrelated.
- Support non-linear learning (Katerndahl, 2005) through training scenarios which reflect the unpredictable reality faced by health practitioners, and which encourage non-linear learning.

Key to many of these approaches are teambuilding exercises which focus on the group, rather than individual performance, and which focus on process rather than prescriptive content (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001).

Reconceptualising outcomes

A potential workforce consideration in the face of 'wicked' complexity is the recognition that there are never complete solutions, but 'better' or 'worse' or 'good enough'. In complex circumstances, expectations of outcome should accommodate relative and/or partial success. The role that clinical education and training has in promoting clinical and service outcome measures is important. Standard outcome measures might not be suited to recording relative success. Therefore alternate metrics may be required in order to validate the practitioner investment that health care practitioners make in complex cases. Increasingly, more subtle, qualitative or subjective measures may be needed (Goberman-Hill & Fox, 2011; Hannold, Hanjian, Jordan, Roach, & Velozo, 2008; Levack, Kayes, & Fadyl, 2010).



Resilience

Finally, health care complexity requires certain workforce responses to mitigate potential consequent stress for health care practitioners. Adequate workforce training and structures for peer/professional supervision and support, as well as time and space for critical reflection are needed (McAllister & McKinnon, 2008). Under these circumstances it may be possible to view health care complexity as a positive challenge for the well prepared and motivated health practitioner.