

# Nurse navigators

Queensland's health sector is facing increasing challenges driven by a growing and aging population, an increasing burden of chronic diseases, a complex health system, increased demand for services and a constrained funding environment. A key priority for Queensland Health is to address these challenges, ensure patient safety and provide quality care.

Nurses have a significant impact on patient safety and health outcomes. Evidence suggests that strengthening the nursing workforce can improve access to health services, shorten the length of stay in hospital for patients, improve clinical outcomes, reduce waiting times, and lower inpatient mortality.

## Nurse navigator—a new model of care

As part of the *Nursing Guarantee* policy, Queensland Health has introduced a new nurse navigator model of care that will see an additional 400 nursing roles progressively added to the state's Hospital and Health Services over the next four years.

The nurse navigator roles are clinical roles held by experienced nurses with expert clinical knowledge and in-depth understanding of the health system, whose focus is to support patients with complex health care needs. These nurses have the breadth and depth of clinical skills required to identify and monitor the health care requirements of high needs patients, identify the appropriate action required and to facilitate timely access to appropriate services.

Nurse navigators play a key role in supporting and coordinating a patient's entire health care journey, rather than focusing on just a specific disease or condition. This role is underpinned by the principles of delivering coordinated and patient-centred care, creating partnerships across different health providers and sectors, improving patient outcomes and enabling improvements across the system.

Research shows that a large number of patients find it difficult to successfully access, understand, evaluate and communicate health information to improve their health. Through their knowledge of the treatment of health conditions nurse navigators will also help educate patients about self-management of their health needs and empower them to make decisions on their own health care.

This integrated and proactive approach to health care service delivery will help ensure patients receive the most appropriate service when and where they need it. In some cases, this may even reduce their need for hospital admission.

## Nurse navigators in action

### Scenario 1

May is 85 years of age, lives in a nursing home and wants to maintain her independence. She has hypertension, macular degeneration with cataracts, mobility issues due to arthritis and needs bilateral knee replacements.

May needs help coordinating the care she requires from a range of providers. Her nurse navigator plays a key role for May by acting as her advocate in aligning and coordinating her appointments with her GP, orthopaedic surgeon, ophthalmologist and the nursing home staff, and ensuring the least amount of disruption for her.

May's nurse navigator works across the network of health service providers ensuring quality care is provided throughout her journey. The nurse navigator provides a nurse-led model of service that focuses on meeting May's needs, educating her on her care options to make informed decisions about her health, and supporting her during her interactions with the various services and professionals who will care for her on her journey through the health system.

## Scenario 2

John is 59 years of age and lives in a remote area of Queensland. He has a background of chronic heart disease, peripheral vascular disease and has poorly controlled type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Over the last week John has been getting increasingly short of breath and visits his local health centre before being admitted to hospital for treatment for pneumonia. The hospital recognises that John's care needs are complex and assigns him a nurse navigator. The navigator helps identify and coordinate access to the services that John requires so that he isn't left to do this on his own when he is at his sickest and most confused, and helps ensure that John will receive the care he needs, when and where he needs it.

The navigator also helps John with his hospital admission, develops a care plan and will be his key point of contact in negotiating the health system.

John's nurse navigator works across organisational and sectoral boundaries to coordinate and manage his complex health care needs, taking into account his medical history and remote location. The nurse navigator acts as a central point for communication and engagement with all stakeholders who have a role in John's health care, ranging from his local health service, to his cardiology and endocrinology specialist nurses and doctors hundreds of kilometres away, as well as his family members.

The nurse navigator spends time with John to educate him about his conditions and will support him to self-manage his health and wellbeing. Having identified John as a high risk patient, the nurse navigator maintains regular contact with him to ensure he is safe and his health needs are being met.

This end-to-end approach helps John overcome any potential barriers to receiving the care he needs, and helps him avoid unplanned readmissions to hospital.

## Benefits

Patients, particularly those with complex health care needs requiring services from numerous care providers, or those who have presented multiple times to a health service, stand to benefit from the nurse navigator service. Through a clinical focus and understanding, these nurses ensure a patient is treated in the correct place, at the correct time, by the correct health care professional.

The service provided by nurse navigators will complement other care coordination services through the development of partnerships across sectors and providers, ensuring a system-wide, integrated approach to health service delivery. This will help patients with high and complex needs to move seamlessly through the health system, linking them with the right health professionals at the right time and in the right place, and ensuring they receive care that is tailored to their needs.

More efficient use of resources in service delivery also results in lower system-wide costs, particularly for those populations with multiple health and social needs, and significant productivity gains for all health professionals and the broader health system.

## More information

This initiative is led by the Department of Health's Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer. For more information please visit <http://www.health.qld.gov.au>

### Benefits

- 400 experienced nurses with clinical knowledge and system understanding supporting a patient's end-to-end health care journey.
- Complements and supports other health care services.
- Lower system-wide costs.