Physician Assistant Staffing in a Rural New Zealand Hospital
GORE - SOUTHLAND - NEW ZEALAND

- Located in Eastern Southland, Gore is the service centre for a thriving rural community.
- Catchment population approximately 20,000.
- Centrally located - 45 minutes away from Invercargill - 90 minutes away from Dunedin.
- Close to the scenic Southern Lakes area & only an hour away from sea & the attractions of the southern coast.
- Affordable cost of living - median house price as of November 2016 was $202,333.
Gore Health operates a rural community owned integrated health facility which includes a 20 bed public hospital and provides a wide range of public/private health services:

- Medical & ATR inpatients
- 24/7 Emergency Department
- Birth and postnatal
- Specialist Outpatient Clinics
- Allied Health
- District Nursing
- X-ray
- Laboratory
- Mobile Surgical Services
- GP Practice
- Dental Practice
- MoleMap
WHAT IS A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT?

• A PA is a nationally certified and state-licensed medical professional in the USA.

• PAs practice medicine in healthcare teams with physicians and other providers.

• They provide healthcare services typically performed by a physician, under the supervision of a physician.

• Must graduate from an accredited educational program for physician assistants.
WHAT DO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS DO?

- Take/review patients’ medical histories
- Examine patients
- Order and interpret diagnostic tests
- Diagnose a patient’s injury/illness
- Give treatment
- Assess and record a patient’s progress
- Prescribe (not yet in NZ)
Employment projections data for Physician Assistants in USA
2014 - 2024

HEALTH WORKFORCE NZ (HWNZ)

• Component of Ministry of Health - established in 2009

• Leads & supports planning, training & development of NZ health workforce

• Sponsored 2 pilot demonstrations to bring US trained PA’s to small NZ communities to assess their potential contribution to existing NZ health workforce.

• Stage 1 - hospital environment took place in Counties Manukau DHB (Middlemore Hospital) on outskirts of Auckland

• Stage 2 - primary care setting took place in small cities/towns in North Island & rural hospital ED in South Island (Gore Hospital).
NZ PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT - PILOT SITELOCATIONS

AUCKLAND

HAMILTON

TOKOROA

TANEATUA

GORE
NZ PILOT DEMONSTRATIONS - PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

2010

- 12 month trial PA role - September 2010 to August 2011
- Two PA’s - Surgical/Hospitalist project - Middlemore Hospital

2012

- 24 month trial PA role – December 2012 to November 2014
- Seven PA’s - primary care setting & rural hospital ED - Tokoroa, Hamilton, Taneatua, Gore
EVALUATION - PHASE 2 OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT DEMONSTRATION

SYNERGIA REPORT
“The initial orientation support from the existing health workforce, and the ongoing support & training from HWNZ, were key factors in supporting the integration of the PA’s into the New Zealand health system”. Synergia pg. 14
KEY POTENTIAL PA CONTRIBUTION:

1. In areas where workforce shortages remain and are likely to continue

2. Contributing to a financially sustainable health system
“Patient satisfaction with PA’s was high across all trials. An evaluation of PAs across four settings in Queensland found that 91% of patients were very satisfied and 6% were fairly satisfied with the quality of care they received from the Physician Assistant”.

Synergia pg. 24
“There appear to be no concerns over the quality of care that Physician Assistants provide, and the growth of the PA role in overseas jurisdictions can be seen to support the view that PAs are clinically safe.” Synergia pg. 24
“Specifically, the staff survey indicates that most of the staff either agreed or strongly agreed that the PAs that they worked closely with:

• are adaptable and flexible, depending on the requirements of the practice (98%)
• have a good rapport with patients (98%)
• are accepted by the clinical team (97%)
• are accepted by administrative staff (98%)
• are good at communicating with clinical and administrative staff (98%)”  Synergia pg. 46
“Overall, the colleagues of PAs at all the sites indicated that the PAs were making a valuable contribution to their clinical settings. For example, there was also a generally positive response from staff in the following areas:

• improved throughput of patients (96% agreed or strongly agreed)
• reduced the workload of existing staff (97% agreed or strongly agreed)
• adding something that is distinct from existing roles in the clinical setting (89% agreed or strongly agreed)”
The Administrators and Managers also valued the adaptability of the PAs to adjust to their specific health care settings:

“Overall, the PAs have generally integrated with the business models of their host organisations, and worked in with the existing clinical structures and models at host sites. For the most part, the practice models have generally not changed, with the Pas operating in their clinical settings in a similar capacity to doctors”. Synergia pg. 64
In all the clinical sites, doctors, nurses, pharmacists agreed on one key issue:

“The lack of prescribing rights was the most commonly cited challenge to the integration of the PA role at the different settings, and particularly at the practice settings. Allowing PAs to prescribe was also the most frequently cited recommendation for the future development of the role in New Zealand in the staff survey.” Synergia (Appendix 2) pg. 12
• Approximately 6,000 patients are seen in ED at Gore Hospital each year

• In 2012 Gore Health was selected by Health Workforce NZ to trial the role of PA – ED at Gore Hospital
Meeting the future health needs of rural communities requires ongoing innovation in approaches to health service delivery and workforce development.
Physician Assistant
Mobile Scheduling Technology
Healthcare Robotics
Telehealth
Psycho-social interventions
THE GORE EXPERIENCE

• First PA, arrived at Gore Hospital in December 2012 to work in the Emergency Department for a 2 year term
• From Wyoming USA
• PA for 9 years since she graduated from University of New England in Portland with a Masters of Science - Physician Assistant studies specialising in Community & Rural Health
• Employed since 2003 by the Teton Valley Medical Centre Family Practice & Emergency room - provided coverage for local rural towns
Since 2014, Gore Health has employed three PA’s to work in ED at Gore Hospital – 2 for a 1 year term & the current PA for a 2 year term.
THE GORE EXPERIENCE - ROSTERING

• PA – ED rostered on with a Medical Officer who provides oversight and supervision as required for Monday to Friday day shifts (00800hrs to 1700hrs).

• After Hours on call shift (1700hrs to 00800hrs) - always a Medical Officer 2nd on call to provide oversight as required.

• Generally, the PA’s at Gore only work in ED and do not cover Internal or Family Medicine.
The PA working at Gore ED had a substantial effect on the working hours of the other clinicians.

With the PA, average hours worked per week for MOs reduced from 72.3 hours per week to 54.8 hours per week.

Hours of the weekend MOs reduced from 53.8 hours per week to 48.5 hours per week.
## THE GORE EXPERIENCE - ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES

### Approximate Savings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical Officer Salary (including CME)</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician Assistant Salary (including CME)</td>
<td>$115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salary Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$65,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency fees saved</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected locum fees saved</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>$180,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE GORE EXPERIENCE - BENEFITS

• Better patient outcomes, reduce waiting times, greater patient satisfaction, greater efficiencies, providing “better, sooner, more convenient services”, through ensuring the ED workforce meets service demand and Ministry of Health targets of “Shorter Stays in ED Departments.”

• Improved working environments for our doctors leading to increased job satisfaction – this will assist with attracting and retaining doctors.
THE GORE EXPERIENCE - BENEFITS

• Reduced workload and the level of on-call commitments for ED doctor.

• Greater workforce stability - a possible solution to assist in alleviating the shortage of doctors.

• Reduction in labour costs and dependence on expensive locums in a time of fiscal constraints.
THE GORE EXPERIENCE - BENEFITS

• Workforce diversity and flexibility and more efficient coordination of the workforce.

• Increased time for doctors for teaching and learning opportunities.

• Provides a potential career pathway for other health professionals seeking greater responsibility and job security.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote the PA role in small hospital ED department throughout NZ & Australia as a strategy for increasing health care access, retaining doctors, & Increasing efficiency & sustainability.

Recruit & retain PAs with prior ED/generalist experiences in rural, remote & other isolated settings.
2. Encourage the development of PA regulatory processes - including prescribing rights - in recognition of the value of PAs, especially in rural and remote generalist and ED roles.
3. Aside from Queensland (James Cook University) there are currently no PA educational programs in NZ or Australia.

Present information about PA benefits & training models to Deans of Australasian Medical Schools with the goal of creating PA programs with a rural focus on admissions, curriculum, clinical training & deployment.