Patient Liaison Network—improving the journey for country patients having to travel to access health care

Pam Pratt¹, Karen Dixon¹, Lyn Olsen¹
¹Country Health SA Local Health Network

The patient liaison nurse (PLN) role, across areas of country South Australia, formally began in 2007. It was recognised there was a need for a key contact in country health services to better manage patient journey issues.

The formalisation of the PLN role in country health services along with the rural liaison nurse role in metropolitan-based health services has enabled the network to form with a common purpose to improve the patient journey for country people. ‘Aboriginal patient pathway officers’ were put into practice to specifically target patient journey issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Liaison nurses are the central contact for country clients and they:

- become the link person for communications between country and metro
- promote the access of care options closer to home
- create awareness of the issues faced by country clients accessing health services outside their area
- advocate to support a return home from metro hospitals
- become the resource person for services available to assist the patient journey
- ensure discharge planning processes occur in a timely manner.

The Patient Liaison Network coordinator’s role was introduced in 2010 to provide essential support for patient liaison nurses and other health professionals, to develop and disseminate information supporting positive patient journeys and ensure that the Patient Liaison Network continued to have active engagement in coordination of patient journeys.

Advocacy about patient journey issues, and a stronger patient-centred-care focus, has resulted in significant improvements across country and metropolitan health services for individual patients.

This paper will present the progress so far, documented benefits and key achievements.