



Centre Health reflects learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic

COORDINARE recently spoke with Kylie Bradley and Bronwen Timbs, two of Centre Health's practice managers about their experience navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Managing the impact of the pandemic on our general practice has been a huge learning curve, we've realised that planning for a disaster needs to be part of ongoing conversations," said Kylie.

"Much of what we have experienced is not something you could plan for. Our initial response to COVID was to implement our influenza outbreak policy. We needed to update our [Emergency Response Planning Tool \(ERPT\)](#) and have been constantly updating our systems and procedures as we learn about the COVID-19 virus and as the guidelines and eligibility for vaccines and medications change."

All staff have been trained in emergency response procedures and have been given a hard copy of the ERPT. Dealing with emergency situations of any variety and discussing scenarios form part of Centre Health's monthly staff meetings.

"It compounds, you think you're on top of things in responding to the pandemic and then something else changes. Every day is confusing, this pandemic is not predictable. It's important to have a team approach and not hold all knowledge with one person, as during a disaster key administration staff or management may not be available," said Kylie.

"The pandemic has been very tough on our staff and general practice has become a high intensity environment. Our staff need a level of maturity and resilience to be able to cope with the stress. It is not easy to say no to people who are not happy, triaging patients according to the latest guidance, following self-isolation and testing rules," she said.



24,500

patients have visited the practice in the past two years



400+

patients a day

Centre Health at Barrack Heights boasted 18 full-time GPs prior to the pandemic, they now have 12.5. Although GP attrition is due to a number of factors, the impact on staff members and patients is significant.

“We are advertising for more GPs but all medical centres are in the same position. General practice is overwhelmed,” said Kylie.

“We are booked two weeks in advance and the phones never stop ringing. We have 24500 patients who have visited our practice in the past two years and can see up to 400 patients a day. We have established four additional isolation rooms so patients with cold and flu symptoms who have a negative RAT test can be seen in an isolation room in person,” she said.

“The pandemic has forced us to embrace technology more readily and to increase our capability, for example we installed a separate fax line to free up our 20 phone lines. Telehealth has saved us all time and reduced foot traffic and most of our GPs are now using escripts and safe script. We also communicate better as a workplace, an internal message bubble will appear immediately on computer screens with key messages staff need to know, plus we now also email important updates,” said Kylie.

Bronwen adds, “We quickly realised that we needed to provide our staff with opportunities to have fun and to destress. Because we couldn’t have face to face staff meetings for 18 months, we held regular competitions like Bingo with prizes.”

“For instance, when Gladys was holding daily press conferences, we ran a Gladys jacket colour competition. We have cake once a month and celebrate everyone’s birthdays,” she said.

Centre Health’s key learnings from the pandemic include; hiring a larger casual staff pool to cover absences from work and to avoid staff burnout, having additional PPE in stock and stocking emergency kits on a monthly basis.

COORDINARE is committed to supporting general practice through every phase of a disaster or medical emergency. Being prepared helps to ensure that when disasters happen, you and your staff are ready to respond effectively.

To register your interest or read more about volunteering in a disaster view this [link](#).

To read additional tips and further information in COORDINARE’s [Primary health disaster response and recovery webpage](#).

If your practice would like to share their learnings from recent disaster and pandemic experiences please contact communications@coordinare.org.au.



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