



Media Release

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New primary care role to be tested

A new type of health care worker to be introduced in a number of Auckland GP practices aims to benefit patients by freeing up the time of both GPs and nurses.

Comprehensive Care is being supported by Health Workforce New Zealand (HWNZ) to demonstrate the role of the primary care practice assistant (PCPA) in Waitemata PHO.

The practice assistants will undertake a range of tasks to support the primary care team such as assisting with nurse led clinics (immunisation, screening and diabetes), recording clinical measurements, treatment room preparation, and sterilising equipment. Tasks will be delegated and duties performed under the supervision of a GP or practice nurse.

HWNZ Director Brenda Wraight said: "As we make the shift to providing more care outside of hospitals, the practice assistant role has the potential to offer real value to the New Zealand health system. Practice assistants will free up the time of GPs and practice nurses enabling them to see more patients."

Twenty students are being recruited for the demonstration including some assistants and receptionists already working in local primary care practices. Students will begin their practice-based and tertiary learning in February 2012. Tertiary studies will be undertaken part-time over three semesters.

Comprehensive Care, AUT University and Unitec Institute of Technology have developed a practice assistant education programme at Level 4 and 5 (NZQA). Dr Susan Shaw of AUT University said: "The objective is to provide a recognised career structure for students who wish to enter the primary care workforce as practice assistants."

Dr Lannes Johnson, GP and Clinical Director of Waitemata PHO said: "We believe the PCPA role has the potential to add benefit to all types of New Zealand practices. We hope that through this project we will be able to develop a set of national protocols for practice assistants that can be used throughout New Zealand."

The demonstration will run for two years and will be fully evaluated to assess the impact on the health workforce, including assessment of professional time saved and the cost and benefits of introducing the role nationally.

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