The PARTY Project 2007-08 trial kicked-off this month after the successful recruitment of six practices to the first round of the randomised control trial. The first round practices cover a diverse geographical spread across Melbourne and represent: solo GP practices; large group practices and community health centres. Whilst this is not a requirement of participating PARTY practices, the majority of practices employ at least one general practice nurse.

“After the lead time developing and modifying our trial instruments and measures, and conducting our PARTY pilot, it’s a great feeling to start the trial. It has been a huge team effort and we are delighted that practices are committing to this complex but exciting research project,” said Brenda Grabsch, PARTY Project Coordinator.

The first six trial practices are currently attending individual briefing sessions to finalise consenting processes and initiate baseline profiling of practice systems and of young people attending the practice (in the 14 to 24 year age group).

The second round of PARTY practices will commence their participation in the PARTY Project trial in September 2007.

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May/June 2007

Nurse-led adolescent health clinics have been set-up in general practices in two rural and one regional area in Victoria, as part of the PARTY Practice Nurse Adolescent Clinics for Health Evaluation (PANACHE) research study.

The PANACHE nurse-led clinics will be conducted from the end of May to September 2007. The clinics commenced after the five participating nurses completed an intensive training program focusing on the mental and sexual aspects of adolescent health care, and on developing specialised communication skills for working with young people. For the select group of nurses participating in PANACHE, this new role has also involved the nurses: conducting focus groups with young people and community service providers; speaking to local high school groups; and conducting mail outs and other marketing campaigns to promote their new services.

Dr Danielle Newton, PANACHE Research Fellow commented, “While it is still early days with respect to recruitment, the nurses have all been enthusiastic about contributing positively to the lives of young people in their local communities”.

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PARTY WORKSHOP PRESENTATION: "Waiting for the Doc or Talking to Mum": Can expanding the role of general practice nurses in young peoples’ health improve the accessibility and acceptability of general practice services to young people?


Workshop presenter:
Verity Newnham

Young people are underrepresented in visits to the GP, face significant barriers in accessing services and often present with complex issues that require long consultations and medico-legal considerations. GPs and practice nurses (PNs) working with young people require specific skills and resources to facilitate access to services and detect psychosocial disease burdens and underlying risk-taking behaviours. This paper explored the current evidence and research on adolescent health primary care services provided by PNs and the potential impact this could have on barriers to access, such as GP waiting times and service costs.
An important aim of the PARTY and PANACHE Projects is to support the professional development of practice nurses working in adolescent general practice in Australia.

This has included:
1) Supporting the professional development and inclusion of Practice Nurses as members of the PARTY and PANACHE research team.
2) Developing evidence on the acceptability of an expanded role for practice nurses in adolescent health to nurses, general practitioners, young people and their parents.

As part of this commitment, the PARTY and PANACHE projects have supported Practice Nurse Research Fellowships being undertaken by PARTY’s adolescent health nurses, Verity Newnham and Judy Evans. The nurses were awarded an 18 month Primary Health Care Research and Development (PHCRED) Fellowship to join Melbourne University’s Primary Care Research Unit (PCRU).

The Practice Nurse Research Fellowships aimed to:
1) Provide specialist nursing expertise to adolescent health projects being conducted by PCRU.
2) Support and further develop the research capacity of nurses working in primary health care.

The Fellowships, which conclude at the end of June, have supported the nurses to conduct their own research project, nested within the PARTY and PANACHE studies.

The PARTY and PANACHE projects will also inform policy development in adolescent health care for practice nursing as part of a series of recommendations to be presented to the State and Territory and Federal Health Ministers.

Practice Nursing Research in Australia

The role of practice nurses (PNs) in an Australian general practice setting still requires clear definition and direction.

Currently, around 60% of practices have a practice nurse (PN) according to latest figures obtained by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN). Current roles cover four main domains: 1) clinical care, 2) organisation, 3) administration and 4) integration (‘linkage’) (Watts et al, 2004). The future will see less time in administration and more in the other three roles.

The scope of practice nursing still varies from practice to practice. The majority of PNs still perform the conventional task of assisting general practitioners in acute treatments. Although PNs in some practices are adopting an extended role of complex nursing, they are nevertheless still carrying out tasks delegated by their employer general practitioners (Halcomb et al, 2006).

In their overview of Australian practice nursing, Halcomb and her colleagues commented on the dearth of PN research and found that the literature spanning 30 years of research findings was exclusively focused on the demographics, role, educational/training gaps, and consumer perceptions and expectations of practice nurses. They suggested that Australian PN research needs to progress beyond the exploratory and descriptive (Halcomb et al, 2006).

The development of practice nursing in Australia is now at the point where it must demonstrate an ability to actively generate research relevant to PNs. Research helps define and expand the role of PNs in general practice. It empowers the profession to make policies and decisions that directly impact it as well as patients’ clinical outcomes. Research capacity building links PNs to research, and is an important part of professional and career development.

Research supporting further investigation of the role for Practice Nurses in adolescent health care delivery in general practice

The PN role and efficacy in primary care has been well-established in the UK, US and NZ and a review of available research has shown that nurses can achieve health outcomes that are as good as those of GPs often with superior interpersonal skills (Horrocks et al, 2002). Health promotion and preventive care are roles already adopted by PNs in the UK (Watts et al, 2004).

Collaborative practice between PNs and GPs seems the preferred model, especially for health risk assessment and therapeutic care, in order to increase efficiency, reduce costs, improve provider satisfaction, patient access to services and health outcomes (Watts et al, 2004, Patterson et al, 2003). This model recognises the unique and overlapping scope of clinical care provided by the GP and PN forming an interdependent, multidisciplinary team for holistic patient care (Watts et al, 2004).

Studies of depressed adults have shown that outcomes are improved when non-physician staff, such as nurses, are also involved in assisting with patient evaluation and management (Asarnow et al, 2002).

The way forward...

Findings from a recent discussion group of four PN Research Fellows, concluded that PNs need to take charge of the PN research agenda and explore the role and science underpinning nursing practice in general practice. They also highlighted an important advocacy role for nursing organisations, in supporting the participation of PNs in research and recognised the need for on-going funded and targeted opportunities for nurses and investment from government and academic departments.

Defining Professional Roles and Building Research Capacity in Adolescent Primary Care Nursing

SUPPORTING PRACTICE NURSES IN RESEARCH

- Increased funded opportunities for exposure to research.
- Programs to support practice nurses wanting to pursue further study in academia, as well as to be greater consumers and participants in research.
- PN academic role models, research networks and peers.
- A structured induction and interactive seminar program.
- Projects that are directly relevant to clinical nursing practice.

Findings from a discussion group of Practice Nurse Research Fellows within the Primary Care Research Unit (PCRU), Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.

Pictured: Practice nurses fellows, students and researchers discussing paper test policies and procedures.
WELCOME NEW PARTY STAFF!

As preparations for the commencement of the 2007 PARTY Trial have progressed, the PARTY team has grown. All in all, eight new staff members have been working on PARTY with skill sets ranging from database programming, data management, interviewing, social science and graphic design.

Sonia Caruana– DHS Trainee
Sonia Caruana is in the final year of the Victorian Department of Human Services Victorian Public Health Training Scheme.
Sonia has joined PARTY on a four month placement to work with Health Economist, Janelle Seymour. She is identifying Medicare initiatives and incentives relevant to the provision of health care to young people and identifying the characteristics of a health service, provided by general practice, most valued by young Australians. This information will be used to design a discrete choice experiment (DCE) survey, the first of its kind involving young people and general practice.

Fan Yang– Data Manager
Fan Yang joined the PARTY team as a Data Manager in February 2007. Fan’s background is in Applied Mathematics and Statistics and she has previously worked as a Data Analyst on projects linked to the Australian National University and The University of Melbourne. As a Data Manager, Fan will monitor and manage the data, work with all the other team members to gather any comments and requests about the data, and liaise with practice staff and PARTY interviewers.

David Ormiston-Smith– Database Programmer
David joined the PARTY team as a programmer in February 2007. Prior to this he has worked on other IT projects in various other faculties at the University of Melbourne. His role in the PARTY project includes: the creation and management of databases used to store survey data and track survey participants, and the design of user-friendly interfaces to these databases.

Adrian Slattery– Graphic Design
Adrian in a Bachelor of Arts student who began working for PARTY in January to assist with the development of PARTY promotional materials.

New PARTY resources developed to support healthy ‘help-seeking’ behaviour in young people

New PARTY resources have been developed in consultation with young people and PARTY pilot practices, to assist general practices in becoming youth-friendly.

PARTY is currently developing a number of resources to address gaps identified by PARTY pilot practices through the quality improvement cycles being conducted as part of the system change component of the PARTY study.

Examples include:
PARTY Parents’ brochure-
aims to provide practical information to assist parents with supporting their teenagers to develop health help seeking behaviours.

PARTY Young peoples’ brochure-
is still in the development phase and will assist young people by providing information on accessing general practice, Medicare, key psycho social risk behaviours in adolescence and confidentiality policies and exclusions.

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Do you know anyone who would be interested in subscribing to the PARTY Newsletter? Please feel free to forward this newsletter onto others. We are also interested in your feedback and/or suggestions. Please e-mail any comments or requests to Verity Newnham at vnewnham@unimelb.edu.au.