

## Background to the DEU Project

Clinical experience is an essential component of any undergraduate nursing programme. A wide range of clinical placements are provided by the CDHB for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) at CPIT School of Nursing.

The current model of clinical teaching and learning for undergraduate students centres on the preceptorship model of individualised one-on-one support, provided by experienced Registered Nurses (RNs) from within the clinical environment. In this model, academic staff visit intermittently to provide curriculum integration and to monitor the student's progress with the student and their preceptor. However, given the current clinical environment of busy wards, high acuity patients and the staff mix of full time, part time and casual workers the preceptorship model has been difficult to maintain.

The impetus for establishing Dedicated Education Units (DEUs) for undergraduate nursing students was based on both anecdotal evidence and emerging quality data from within the CPIT School of Nursing and the CDHB. Data gathered using a Clinical Evaluation Tool (CET) supported anecdotal evidence that the existing preceptorship model (Figure 1) was not meeting the needs of students, clinical or academic staff in many clinical placement areas.

Factors thought to be impacting on the successful implementation of one-on-one preceptorship include:

- The inability of undergraduate nursing students to 'mirror' the rostered-rotating shifts undertaken by RNs
- Preceptor absence from the clinical environment due to sickness, study or annual leave
- The fluctuating demands of the clinical environment
- The increasing number of RNs working part time
- The impact of casual 'hospital pool' or outside agency staff on each area
- Limited knowledge and understanding of the BN Programme by CDHB staff
- The perceived 'invisibility' of the CPIT Clinical Lecturer (CL)
- The challenges faced by both CDHB preceptors and CPIT Clinical
- Lecturers around student assessment.

The above created challenges for clinical areas. In some cases students were working with different preceptors on a regular basis resulting in a lack of consistency in experiences and expectations, and difficulty collating data for student assessment purposes. Given these factors, Dr. Cathy Andrew (Head of School, Nursing CPIT) and Ms Mary Gordon (Executive Director of Nursing, CDHB) supported the establishment in January 2006 of a collaborative Governance Group and a Project Team to investigate alternative models of clinical education with the aim to address these issues.

A literature review of clinical teaching and learning models, undertaken by the Project Team, identified an Australian model of clinical education, the Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) as worth investigation. This model was developed in the late 1990s by nursing lecturers at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia in response to a call for greater collaboration between the clinicians and academics involved in clinical nursing education (Wotton & Gonda, 2004).

In addition, the KPMG (2001) report on undergraduate nursing education in New Zealand noted that “DEUs are a good example of a model in which students work shifts along side registered nurses but do so in a collaborative and supportive environment in which clinicians and educators work together” (p.88).

Flinders University’s continuing use of the DEU model is testament to its success in meeting the teaching and learning needs of undergraduate nursing students, clinicians and academics alike. As a result, adaptations of the DEU model have been established in a variety of BN programmes both in Australia and the United States of America (Edgecombe, Wotton, Gonda & Mason, 1999; Miller, 2005; Moscato, Miller, Logsdon, Weinberg & Chorpenning, 2007; Pappas, 2007).

Given the results of the literature review, the Project Team was sponsored by the Governance Group to undertake a site visit to Flinders University to consult with key stakeholders about the concept and benefits of the DEU model of clinical education. Following this, the DEU Project Team tabled a report to the Governance Group recommending that:

1. A DEU model be piloted for CPIT nursing students undertaking their clinical placements at CDHB sites
2. The pilot project should be formally evaluated using Action Research methodology to establish the efficacy of the model.

Both recommendations were accepted by the Governance Group.

## References

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