



AUT embraces call for new breed of health professional

Health professionals grappling with staffing shortages* and shifting skills demands now have support from the National Centre for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice, which launched at AUT University in February 2009.

The Centre was officially opened by the Minister of Health Tony Ryall at AUT University's North Shore campus.

It is strongly evident in the literature and in current health policy and strategy that there is a committed drive from the New Zealand Government to ensure health services of the future are based on interdisciplinary co-operation and collaboration and inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral working.

Professor Max Abbott, Dean of the Faculty of Health & Environmental Sciences at AUT, says education is a vital strategy for managing the demands of today's healthcare sector.

"Creating a health workforce that can collaborate across disciplines and across sectors to provide person and community-centred care as opposed to the traditional, more individualised, model of care, is one of the most promising solutions," says Professor Abbott.

"The establishment of an educational centre which will prepare New Zealand health professionals to work in this manner illustrates AUT's awareness of the changing roles of health practitioners."

The first of its kind in New Zealand, the Centre has been developed with input from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The centre has four main functions: education, research, practice development (which includes an on-site integrated healthcare clinic) and AUT's Ara Hauora Maori or Maori Pathway.

Students learn and work together (both in the classroom and in work-based environments) to ensure they acquire collaborative team working knowledge.

They are exposed to the work of other health disciplines so they understand and respect the contribution that each makes. All the while ensuring the care they provide is patient and/or community-centred as opposed to profession-centred.

AUT University has conducted significant research into the areas of interprofessional learning and collaborative practice and plans to increase its research involvement in collaboration with academics and practitioners in other organisations. The research arm of

the centre is tasked with trialling and evaluating interprofessional collaborative models of care.

Evidence shows that when health professionals work collaboratively people get better, not sicker.

“It significantly reduces medical misadventure,” says Professor Abbott. “Care is designed and delivered utilising the expertise of a range of health professionals and patients’ families are more likely to be involved in decisions and care.

“It is also more satisfying for staff and increases morale and output.”

* There is an estimated world-wide shortage of 4.3 million health workers and this is recognised as a critical barrier to achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals (World Health Organisation 2006).

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