

# Accreditation ready, every day

How two Queensland health services are looking to change the face of accreditation in Australia

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Accreditation is a long-standing process in the Australian health sector. Whether you have a clinical or administrative background, it is likely that you have had some involvement in the accreditation process of your health organisation. It is the complex, cyclical process that aims to safeguard the quality and safety of patient care through monitoring the performance of health organisations, against a predetermined set of principles; which in Australia are the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards.

With its ominous reputation, accreditation is the unrelenting black dog that creeps up on health organisations every three to four years. Like a university student's studies that culminate in one single, high-pressure exam, whenever assessment looms, organisations are sent into a frenzy trying to prepare huge mounds of paperwork, and creating the veneer of perfection on one day.

Accreditation has become somewhat of an event management process in which auditors are presented with carefully manicured evidence folders, and are escorted down hallways lined with clinical staff who seem to have a penchant for washing their hands. It is an event marked in every executive and manager's calendar that must be carefully planned and prepared for. But this begs the question: If you're only ready on the days the auditors turn up, what does that mean for your patients on all of the other days?

Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service's motto for 'Quality Care Everyday' has given rise to this philosophy and the regional Queensland organisation aims to change the nature of accreditation in healthcare. The WBHHS Clinical Governance Support Unit has developed the notion of a rolling accreditation cycle with the goal being to achieve consistent readiness, and continual quality improvement.

The idea behind the strategy is to ensure that quality standards are embedded into the



Sinead Taylor is in her final year of her health management internship with Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service. She has a keen interest in quality improvement, project management and health promotion.

day-to-day operational responsibilities of all employees, rather than just at the time of assessment. The WBHHS Director of Clinical Governance, Jeremy van den Akker, described the proposed process as 'the only way forward to ensure standards are employed at the bedside.'

In partnership with Metro South Hospital and Health Service (MSHHS) in Brisbane, WBHHS approached the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) to discuss the opportunity to trial a new accreditation model. In the coming months, WBHHS and MSHHS hope to start a pilot run of this new model, in order to evaluate its effectiveness and applicability for metro, regional and rural health services.

The proposed model will be based on a four-year accreditation cycle, and a 'no notice' approach to assessment. Surveys will occur at a frequency unknown to the health services with Standard 1 (Governance for Safety and Quality in Health Service Organisations) and Standard 2 (Partnering with Consumers)

**Noun. 1. accreditation** - the act of granting credit or recognition (especially with respect to educational institution that maintains suitable standards);  
"a commission is responsible for the accreditation of medical schools"  
certification, enfranchisement - the act of certifying or bestowing a franchise on.



WBHHS Chief Executive Adrian Pennington and Clinical Governance Executive Director Dr Pieter Pike

assessed on each occasion due to their overarching functions. The remaining standards will be evaluated on an alternating basis, but health organisations will not be aware of the schedule of assessment. The organisations will receive two working days' notice prior to onsite surveys occurring, which only allows for minor logistical arrangements to be made.

Any High Risk/Not Met issues will follow the usual AC90 process, and could be identified in any area regardless of standard the surveyors are on site to assess.

While it does sound scary, the idea of the new model is not to try and catch health services in

the wrong; rather it is an attempt to strip back the façade of accreditation that has become somewhat of a production.

Surveyors won't be asked to wade through piles of evidence folders, but instead invited down onto the ward to witness the standard of patient care provided every day. It is an opportunity for health services to demonstrate to the watchdogs, and the community alike, that 'Quality Care Everyday' isn't just a philosophy, it is a reality.

Although the concept is yet to be finalised, WBHHS and MSHHS have the support of ACHS, and approval from the Australian Commission

on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) is currently being sought. It is fair to say that many will be watching with interest to see what impact this ambitious new model will have on the Australian accreditation process, and more importantly the quality and safety outcomes for patients. Watch this space! ■■■

**MORE INFORMATION:**

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