

I get by with a little help from my friends:
How many Allied Health Assistants are enough?

Price A¹, Somerville L², Keating L³, Lloyd J³

¹Physiotherapy Department, Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia;

²Occupational Therapy Department, Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia;

³Allied Health, Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia.

Improved workforce supply is required to meet the current and future demands of healthcare provision. Increasing the use of support worker roles such as Allied Health Assistants (AHAs) can allow this to occur. The reallocation of less complex tasks to AHAs enables Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) to complete more challenging roles, with the aim of improving both AHA and AHP satisfaction and retention.

The current AHA workforce at Alfred Health is inadequate. In Sub-Acute Physiotherapy, 30% of the workforce are AHAs, whilst only 9% of the Acute Physiotherapy workforce are AHAs. Various other Allied Health (AH) disciplines have no AHAs.

A project has been undertaken to quantify the need for AHAs within the Acute and Sub-Acute hospital settings, in a range of disciplines including Physiotherapy. AH staff identified tasks that could be undertaken by AHAs, enabling a framework to be developed. Data was then collected to quantify the amount of time AHPs spend undertaking tasks that could be performed by an AHA.

Of 39.7 EFT of Physiotherapy professionals in the Acute setting, 24% of EFT was identified as work that could potentially be undertaken by an AHA. In Physiotherapy Sub-Acute, 27.2 AHP EFT, indicated 11% of EFT in these tasks. Other results included; Acute Orthotics 61%, Acute Podiatry 42% and Sub-Acute Social Work 37% of EFT spent in AHA attributable tasks.

Opportunities have been identified to undertake workforce redesign through substitution of AHPs for AHAs. Not surprisingly, there are various barriers to implementation which will be presented in the context of the Physiotherapy workforce.

*This project did not require ethics approval. It has been funded through the Victorian Department of Health, Workforce Innovative Grant Program.