

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Entrant: Nirvana Health Group



As house prices push diverse populations to the fringes of Auckland, medical health providers have had to work out how to attract young doctors out of the central city to work alongside them.

This is a major challenge facing East Tamaki Healthcare, who deliver health promotion, public health programmes, education, counselling and information, on-going health assessments, intervention programmes, family planning services and immunisation. They are contracted to Auckland's district health boards to do this at affordable price or, (where possible), free of charge.

ETHC recognises that the diverse populations living on Auckland's fringes, including refugees, Maori, Pacific and other low-income minorities may have complex health, social and language barriers.

And so arose the challenge of attracting young graduates who reflect and mirror this diverse population, out of the central city where they typically want to live and work. This is an international problem, with the trend for new graduates being to want to be in the central city, and not in the fringes.

The questions became: How do they attract the workforce? How to attract the younger generation? And how to support them to work outside of the hospital setting, which can seem very broad and scary?

ETHC hosts medical and nursing students, with a capacity of over 200 placements per year. To date, trainees come from the University of Auckland, University of Otago, Auckland

University of Technology, Manukau Institute of Technology and Australian universities, as well as from other countries.

Key to the solution was to provide peer support and one-on-one education to provide feedback for professional growth. ETHC has a strong multi-disciplinary team which includes GPs, a consultant psychiatrist, and a mental health team. There are expert onsite doctors with special interests plus visiting doctors

All of ETHC's doctors are involved in teaching, and all clinics are accredited as teaching practices for the undergraduate medical training programme. In each clinic there are specially allocated GP educator/mentors for the students.

There are monthly peer review for all clinical staff and trainees are encouraged to attend. Peer review is an evaluation of the performance of individuals or groups of practitioners by members of the same profession or team.

Making new doctors feel comfortable is paramount. Since the clinic network operates seven days a week, 365 days of the year basis, it is common practice that staff offer to work extra hours on special occasions to allow their colleagues to take the time off to celebrate with their respective families. During Ramadan, our Muslim colleagues are supported by the other doctors; and the same is true for Christmas, Chinese New Year, Diwali and other cultural events.

Wahida Amra Safi has been a Registrar with ETHC for the last six months. She talks about her experiences.

"Like most medical students I wanted to specialise and go to hospital. For me, crazy hours were not compatible for a stable family life. Some of my friends who joined specialist programmes and are working 60-80 hours a week are regretting those particular pathways," she says.

"I like being a GP because we have to form relationships, and we can begin to diagnose versus working in the hospital where you may be the fourth doctor to deal with a patient, and you deal with them only one time. The size of ETHC means it provides more services to refer patients to; for example, diabetes nurse specialist, midwife clinic, various midweek clinics, consultant psychiatrist."

To encourage more female general practitioners to join ETHC, has been flexible with their working hours. Female GPs with young families who wish to work shorter hours are accommodated. This includes starting work after they have dropped off their children to school. Many of them would also prefer not to be rostered during afterhours. As their children mature, many of them have increased their working hours to full-time.

Time spent at ETHC has also changed House Officer Tanvir Kaur's views about being a GP. It piqued her desire to work as a GP long term. Her main fear, when she started her placement at ETHC was coping with the intensity of the timeframes and the perceived isolation. However, after three months she realised she was never really isolated, and that there was always someone senior she could talk to. With the right support in place to overcome barriers, her confidence grew.

"Working at Airport Oaks Clinic has been a great experience. Patients present with more emergency type complaints. In fact my supervisor told me three months here is worth a year somewhere else.

"There are lots of things not taught in text books, only gained through dealing with a patient who can be angry and emotional – another advantage of working with high-needs patients.... A good GP should have a good generalist overview of everything – this is the future of medicine, as we cannot keep spending money on hospitals," she says. Tanvir has since applied for the GP programme, and would definitely come back to ETHC. "I would like to work in a high-needs community which is very different from what I thought when I first got here. Being a generalist is difficult, having to manage their overall health in the context of the realities they live in," she says.