



## ***Quality leadership at mecwacare***

For over 50 years mecwacare has developed a reputation for excellence providing quality community care for older people and people with a disability consistent with mecwacare's vision to maximise quality of life of the Victorian community.

Services are delivered by 800 staff and 300 volunteers across 13 worksites and include residential aged care, respite care, in-home support, disability and nursing services.

mecwacare provides in-home support and care to over 6,000 people each week in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Committed to quality, mecwacare listens and responds to the needs of clients and the community to continually improve service delivery.

***"mecwacare has responded to the changing needs of the communities it works amongst, by constantly seeking out and adopting new caring initiatives" (mecwacare web site)***

# Background

mecwacare has an established quality system designed to meet the requirements of:

- Residential Aged Care Accreditation Standards.
- Standards for Disability Services in Victoria.
- Home and Community Care (HACC) National Service Standards.
- AS/NZS 4801 Standard for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems.

mecwacare is contractually obliged to meet only the first three standards. Seeking and obtaining certification against AS/NZS 4801 is an internal management decision reflecting the importance of quality and risk management at mecwacare.

mecwacare's quality system is much more than simply compliance. It delivers quality services to clients and supports continuous quality improvement of client services through the four step problem solving process: Plan Do Check Act. It is also used to identify and understand trends and undertake proactive risk identification and control, critical to effective organisational management.

The quality system is championed and administered by the Quality and Risk Team, a team of 5 dedicated staff responsible for monitoring trends, overseeing continuous improvement, internal/external auditing and quality education.

***"To support the community with a focus on seniors by providing care and services of the highest quality"***  
***(mecwacare Mission Statement)***

# Working well

In working with staff to help them understand the quality system the Quality and Risk Team found that some quality concepts were difficult for staff to grasp.

Riet O'Neill is the Quality Coordinator for Community Services and a member of the Quality and Risk Team. She says that to help communicate these important quality concepts in a way that was meaningful to staff, the team has developed a graphic representation of the quality process, showing the inputs and the outputs. On the inputs side sit the quality feedback mechanisms including quality audits, the continuous improvement plan, meetings and complaints. On the outputs side sits improved service delivery. The graphic is based on the Plan Do Check Act cycle.

***"mecwacare actively encourages and supports continuous improvement, innovation and safe service delivery"***  
***(mecwa web site)***

The Quality and Risk Team is busy taking the graphic out to all the mecwacare sites to use in quality education sessions. Referencing the graphic the team helps staff to reflect on their own experiences and talk about how they deal with quality issues on a day to day basis.

So far the results of the quality training using the graphic are very positive. In the past there were few issues raised and the actions taken in response to those issues were not communicated to staff. Riet reports that communication about quality issues and continuous improvement actions has improved significantly. mecwacare is now getting more issues logged in the quality system and staff understand better what is expected of them. Actions taken in response to issues raised are reviewed at staff meetings keeping everyone in the loop.

# Challenges

In the early days mecwacare's quality system was primarily developed in response to compliance with each service area focusing on their own requirements. This resulted in a quality system that was fragmented and compliance focused.

***"....the need for a more structured, inclusive and organisational-wide approach to quality and risk management was identified" (mecwacare Annual Report 2006-2007)***

Also the quality system originally used a top down approach and unfortunately this led to nice looking policies and procedures that were approved by management but did not always accurately reflect practice.

To overcome the problem mecwacare tried turning the process upside-down by encouraging staff to write their own procedures. Unfortunately staff focused on day to day service delivery found it difficult to respond and this approach never gained momentum.

Today mecwacare has a centralised quality committee made up of representatives from each work area. This committee develops and reviews quality documentation across the whole organisation and representatives only attend meetings when the content is relevant to their expertise or work area.

The quality committee encourages an integrated approach to quality with broad input across the whole organisation. Areas that they have worked on together include medication management, human resources and quality and risk management policies.

# Quality culture

Riet can describe a wide range of strategies in addition to the quality education sessions that the Quality and Risk Team use to constantly advocate for quality. These strategies constantly focus attention on quality and include reminding staff in meetings, making references to the quality system, conducting audits and talking about quality results.

Riet says that although all meetings include continuous improvement as a standard agenda item, questions like "how do we know it works?" and "where is the evidence?" get staff thinking about quality and reminds them to complete the Plan Do Check Act cycle.

For example recently mecwacare reintroduced a newsletter to improve communication with field staff. By asking the questions above staff learnt that the newsletter ("Do") is not the result. Evaluation is needed to find out if the newsletter has addressed the problem or not ("Check") and whether any further improvements need to be implemented ("Act"). The critical question is not "do we have a newsletter?" but "has the identified issue of inadequate communication with field staff been addressed?"

The team also recognises the importance of acknowledging and celebrating quality outcomes and achievements. Recently when Riet received positive feedback from clients, she contacted the staff involved to let them know and offer her congratulations. Regular quality reports and feedback help reinforce the quality message.

***"Constant reminders keep quality alive. Little lights go on" (Riet O'Neill, Quality Coordinator for Community Services)***

# Messages

Riet has the following advice for other organisations working on the development of their quality culture:

- It will take time. The investment is worth it so be patient and persistent.
- Remember it's not that people don't want to support quality – usually they just think they're busy or they just don't get it.
- Lead by example.
- Celebrate outcomes and praise even the smallest steps.
- Involve people and support and encourage them without overwhelming them.
- Clearly document what quality means to your organisation to ensure consistency of understanding.
- Don't assume that upper management understands quality. Keep in mind that they may not but are uncomfortable to admit it because they are responsible for being leaders. Work with managers carefully and keep asking "how do you know it's working?" to keep them thinking about quality.
- Keep it simple.
- Use practical local examples.
- Involve clients by providing quality related information and appropriate forms. You may need different designs of the same documentation for different audiences.

***"The answer is simple solutions. For example residents expressed difficulty finding their way around a large nursing home. Signage was reviewed and new and appropriately placed signs were put up. At a subsequent Residents' Meeting, residents reported satisfaction with the outcome i.e. they are better able to move around the home without getting lost" (Riet O'Neill, Quality Coordinator for Community Services)***

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The logo for mecwacare, featuring the word 'mecwacare' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The 'm', 'e', 'c', 'w', 'a', and 'c' are in blue, while the 'a', 'r', 'e' are in yellow.