SARRAH 2018 CHANGING LANDSCAPES Changing Lives

Electronic records and telehealth facilitate safe, equitable and quality dietetics care closer to home to remote Torres Strait communities

The geographical nature of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) presents challenges for the delivery of health care. Thursday Island (TI) is the hub of the Northern Sector of the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service (TCHHS) and provides a base from which services are provided to 20 distinct communities with primary health centres (PHC) accessible only by combination of ferry, light aircraft and helicopter.

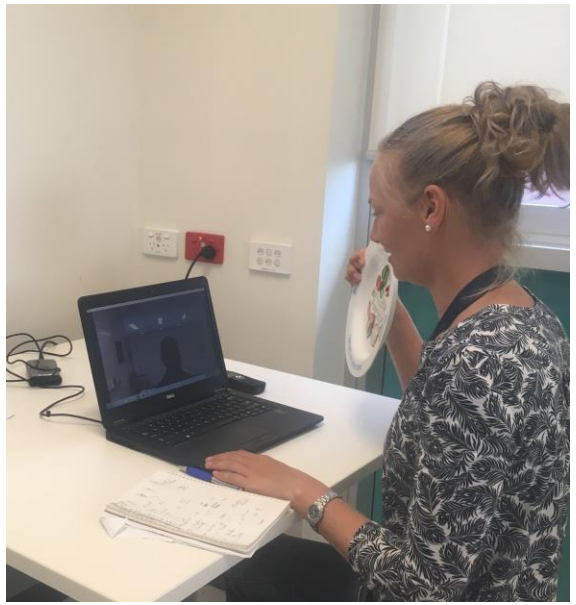
Aerial image of Thursday Island

Map of the Northern Sector of the TCHHS

Prior to 2012, paper based medical records were used and sharing of clinical information across sites was suboptimal. In 2012 an electronic medical record was established across all PHC sites in the Northern TCHHS. Infrastructure and clinical support in PHC for telehealth became established at this same time.
A generalist dietetics service, based on TI, provides services across the region predominately by outreach. The installation and use of both electronic medical records and telehealth infrastructure have facilitated a change in service delivery model to a combination model of outreach and telehealth. Benefits include more equitable access, more timely response to referrals, improved caseload management, increased frequency of follow up, along with a reduction in travel costs and time with reduced outreach travel.

By Marissa Arnot (Senior Dietitian) and Kiah Peterie (Rural Generalist Trainee Dietitian). Contact TCHHS-North-Dietitian@health.qld.gov.au or visit https://www.health.qld.gov.au/services/torres-cape

Early service evaluation indicates increase in telehealth occasions of service, now accounting for 7% of the total OOS with further increase expected. Additionally, a snapshot in 2016 showed less than 5% of category 2 and 3 referrals were actioned within recommended timeframes. This was increased to over 50% in 2017 with additional FTE and the change in service delivery model.



Senior Dietitian Marissa Arnot conducting Telehealth

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