



## SIMULATING INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE

### **What happens when you get about 85 health leaders into a room to discuss major health policy initiatives?**

On 23 October 2014, the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) held an *Integrated Care Simulation*, which included three major potential health policy initiatives, health leaders and policy-makers, a few disgruntled ‘patients’ and a couple of roving journalists stirring up trouble.

The objective was to turn Old Parliament House into a realistic but stage-managed test environment, where participants from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors could help the AHHA gain insight into how these current policy considerations might impact on health services and system integration.

After an opening address from the Federal Member for Boothby, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, the participants dived into the topics, which included the introduction of bundled care packages for people with chronic diseases, a role for private health insurers in the financing of primary care services, and the formation of Primary Health Networks.

While the Simulation made obvious a number of faults inherent in the health system such as the funder-provider divide, AHHA Chief Executive Alison Verhoeven highlighted the renewed potential for ‘game-changing’ thought and collaboration.

“We challenged health leaders from across the system, including academics, healthcare providers, insurers and consumers, to think about positive changes to develop better integrated care, and what became clear was the need for thoughtful leadership in the national conversation about our health system,” Ms Verhoeven said.

“The simulation has helped shine a light on the importance of evidence to inform health policy development, and well-planned implementation to ensure purposeful change and anticipate and mitigate any unintended consequences. Many participants commented that the simulation reinforced the need to tackle issues collaboratively engaging all stakeholders. It was also noted that, at times, those high level talks forget the most important stakeholder in the system—the patient.”

Much discussion about each of the topics centred on equity, choice and respect for the individual, with participants generally being in agreement that these values are central to an optimal health system.

Another key theme that emerged during the three scenarios was the disconnection across the various parts of the health system. When a broad change was proposed to the system, it was observed that each party was mainly concerned with how it affected them, rather than the system as a whole. It was also noted that while there is an assumption that policy makers work in the best interest of patients, not much consultation occurred with them. Broader consultation, better communication and collaboration were seen as being integral to better policy planning and implementation.

### TOP 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Health policy needs to have clear goals, be evidence-based, well-thought through taking account of all potential consequences, and specific on details for all elements of the system, including providers and patients.
- While financial sustainability of the health system is critical, policy makers must not lose sight of patient interests – these must be central to health policy.
- People working within the health sector need to engage regularly with policy makers at all levels in government to highlight any perverse or unintended consequences of policies, as well as to offer alternative solutions.
- Healthcare cannot operate in isolation from social supports and care, and policy and planning should be undertaken together for this reason.
- Integrated strategies and models could work well for people with high health care needs, however more research is required to better support health promotion and illness prevention strategies, including for generally well people.

**The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association is the national peak body for public and not-for-profit hospitals, community and primary healthcare services, and advocates for universal, high quality and affordable healthcare to benefit the whole community.**

For more information on the AHHA, visit <http://ahha.asn.au>.

A detailed report, available soon, will highlight the key themes, recommendations and policy analysis emerging from the Integrated Care Simulation.

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