

Health care leadership, quality and safety

THIS ISSUE OF *Australian Health Review* started as part of a Festschrift to celebrate the work and leadership of Professor Mike Ward, currently Commissioner of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission in Queensland but previously inaugural Senior Director of the Clinical Practice Improvement Centre in Queensland Health and a Professor of Medicine at the University of Queensland, as well as Commissioner of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. During his time at Queensland Health and in clinical practice, Mike made an outstanding contribution to health care in Queensland, recognised by the award of the Public Service Medal. Initially trained as a gastroenterologist, Professor Ward's interest broadened to include organisational issues such as communication among teams, and how to measure and improve quality of care. He was particularly interested in methods of displaying data to highlight the underlying patterns in the information presented. Mike, not surprisingly for someone who occupied a professorial role, was also interested in the development of health professionals and played a key role in the creation and shaping of Queensland Health's world renowned Skills Development Centre.

This issue of the Journal includes three sections which directly and specifically relate to Professor Ward's areas of interest. The first section, on leadership, includes four articles which canvas aspects of the leadership development programs conducted by Queensland Health over the last three years. These programs were critical to the transformation of the Queensland Health culture that was required post Bundaberg. In brief, criticisms of Queensland Health, as a result of formal public Inquiries and in the media, highlighted the need to change the culture of Queensland Health and to promote transparency, openness and clinical engagement. The programs developed by Queensland Health became the largest leadership programs offered anywhere in Australia, let alone in the health industry, with more than 5000 staff participating in two-day leadership programs

(either residential or non-residential) over an 18-month period. The leadership programs were complemented by staff surveys to identify opportunities for improving management in the workplace.

A second cluster of articles deal with quality and safety policy, including providing an overview of some of the statistical methods so dear to Professor Ward's heart. The papers also raise critical policy questions about what should be measured.

Finally, a third cluster of papers relate to interventions to stimulate quality and safety improvement. These include a paper relating to the use of simulation, a paper related to innovative technology to collect information and papers highlighting interventions that arose from clinical engagement.

Together these papers document in the academic literature some of the major changes which are transforming Queensland Health. Too often public bureaucracies hide their light under a bushel: they are subject to the slings and arrows of the media and are often not able to present the good work that is going on behind the scenes. These papers demonstrate that much good work has occurred and is occurring in Queensland Health. Professor Ward is an example of the dedicated and intelligent leadership that resides in many state health authorities that labour to improve the access, quality and sustainability of public health care. Other papers also published in this issue, including another paper about Queensland, traverse related areas. All of the papers here are able to provide health leaders with insight into issues and strategies relevant to their day-to-day work and are commended to the reader.

Stephen Duckett*

Guest Editor

Australian Health Review

stephen.duckett@albertahealthservices.ca

*Stephen Duckett is President & Chief Executive Officer of Alberta Health Services, Edmonton, Canada. From 2006 to 2008 he was Chief Executive of the Centre for Health-care Improvement in Queensland Health and in that role worked with and learned from Professor Ward. □