

Project Management in Health and Community Services: Getting Ideas to Work, 2nd Edition

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Project management is often an assumed skill expected of many health professionals. After all, to an independent observer, patient (or client) engagement, needs identification, development of a treatment plan acceptable to the patient, care implementation and evaluation of that care or treatment have all the hallmarks of project planning. Yet there is a very subtle but important difference in that healthcare delivery increasingly occurs within overarching clinical guidelines and governance structures to ensure quality of care. Although there can be no doubt about the benefits of standardised treatment plans, individual planning is in danger of becoming routine and perhaps almost redundant. Health practitioners become more adept at managing existing plans to meet patient needs, rather than creating plans from scratch. If skills are systematically underutilised, they will surely become systematically underdeveloped.

Project Management in Health and Community Services was first published in 2004 to wide acceptance in the Australian health and community sector. A new edition is timely. Project management is like having children: there are multitudes of guidebooks available and free advice from those around you, but it is only until you have one of your own that the true enormity of what you have undertaken becomes apparent. Many project management resources, although admirable, are often tailored for specific purposes (such as government departments) with examples that have little relevance for health workers; in contrast, this book covers the fundamentals of project management using examples that will be familiar to personnel working in the health and community services sector. It touches on many aspects of generic health administration, acknowledging the roles and influences of government policy and financing on strategic management. There are useful templates and sound practical advice throughout. Each chapter provides a pathway to further resources and information.

The authors takes a pragmatic view regarding 'getting things done'. They acknowledge project evaluation but do not labour the point regarding analysis methods. The ubiquitous acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related

objectives (SMART) is surprisingly absent, although expressed in alternative terms. A gentler and more realistic approach is taken: not every objective can be shoe-horned into a rigid measurable objective—or can it? What is perhaps most admirable about this book is that if a person needs advice or guidance, it is easy to locate and, perhaps more importantly, is concise and understandable. It is consistently referenced throughout and is therefore a reliable textbook, and one to which I shall refer when teaching in future.

The authors acknowledge this is an evolving work. Although this may seem pedantic, there is no mention of the role of ethics in project management. An increasing trend in hospitals is that many quality assurance projects are now subject to review by ethics committees to ensure harm minimisation. This is likely to flow on to community services, especially to support funding requests. Nevertheless all the necessary building blocks are provided to aid project managers to complete ethics applications, and this will probably be expanded upon in future editions. If so, perhaps more detail regarding analysis methods, in particular qualitative analysis, and the avoidance of bias and confounding, might also be considered.

The only other improvement I might suggest for this book (alas and alackaday for copyright laws!) is to have 'Don't Panic' printed in large and friendly letters on the front cover. . .

Conflicts of interest

The reviewer acknowledges that one of the authors is a colleague at the same University and another author is a former teacher of the reviewer.

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