



A PROBLEM SHARED...



Shared Medical Appointments (SMAs) are proving popular with both clinicians and patients.

The premise of the SMA is simple: a small group of patients, perhaps 6-10, with similar conditions or needs, receives both individual attention and the benefits of sharing and learning at a group consultation organised by their practice. These might last for around 90 minutes, and attendees might include the chief clinician as well as members of the extended health team.

It's an idea with enough flexibility built into it to allow varied applications of it from practice to practice. Two recent examples show the range of what can be done.

In **Taupo**, Shane Rakei, a peer support worker in the extended Health Care Home team, runs an 'Off Highways' group consultations for truckers, who meet every fortnight. Shane invites GPs, Dieticians, Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Pharmacists into group meetings as required for 'light touch' health education and individual assessment.

Two recent patients to benefit from the Off Highways group were George (70) and Milton (56), two men who had for years struggled to engage with traditional health services, and who both found themselves in declining health. The Off Highways group proved to be just the ticket for both men, offering a group experience that they found more congenial and inviting than a one-on-one consultation.

Both men like the camaraderie of the other drivers who attend and the relaxed atmosphere in which they get to talk about their health. Both have also seen a significant improvement in their health and outcomes since attending the sessions, notwithstanding their different needs. George, for example, is now so engaged with his health that he has further appointments booked for an Echocardiograph and Spirometry. About the group, he enthuses, "Oh mate, I tell you good, good and more good - and I can now walk across the car park too."

At **Hora Te Pai** Health Services in Paraparaumu, Practice Manager Cherie Seamark and Dr Chris Fawcett, Medical Director decided to give it a go. Cherie shared: "We settled on COPD patients, because it's the winter season and I could match the claiming to the available COPD funding to make the first one free." Hora Te Pai has some 60 or so patients with COPD, and once a list had been drawn up, forming the first group was surprisingly easy.

Says Snooks Forster, one of the attendees, "I've worked at Hora Te Pai for 15 years, and I also have COPD. When Cherie mentioned the group consult I



***Snooks Forster, a patient at Hora Te Pai
Health Services***

immediately liked the idea. Being Maori, it's easier to share your conditions with a group of other people. If you're hurting, sometimes the tendency is to shut up – 'she'll be right', you know? But when you're all in there with the same problem, it's easier to share."

Chris Fawcett agrees. "People definitely felt freer to talk in the group. One thing that arose was what different peoples' levels of health literacy were, and also their levels of actual literacy – that came up when we were trying to sort out their Flinders self-assessment tools. There were a couple of people that needed help to do the questionnaires, and these were matters that wouldn't necessarily have come out otherwise."

The longer appointment also led to an increase in the patients' general understanding of their condition - especially what to do when they got an acute exacerbation of their COPD. "By the end of the 90 minutes," Seamark concludes, "Everyone walked out with a back-pocket script and a new inhaler script, if

necessary." Indeed, details were apparently exchanged, and the patients who attended agreed to meet up for a walk in the next few days.

People noted that not only did the group setting allow them to say things that they wouldn't otherwise say, but that people raised issues that other people in the group had wanted articulated but hadn't been able to. Says Snooks Forster, "I liked it because it was a small group, so there was time for everyone to make themselves heard and understood. I was able to help some of the group with quite basic stuff, but it wouldn't have come out if it weren't for the group sharing."

In an age of people living longer, long-term conditions increasing and a GP workforce under pressure, SMAs look like being one of the smarter ways forward.

Contact the National HCH Collaborative today for access to SMAs resources

HCH journey continues...



It was a moment of recognition for the HCH Collaborative to be acknowledged by decision makers in the health sector. On 28th June 2018, Johnsonville Medical Centre hosted a visit from Health Minister Dr David Clark with members of the Ministry of Health and Capital & Coast DHB, to celebrate HCH Certification of 15 Practices across New Zealand. In attendance were GPs from two of the HCH Certified Practices; Johnsonville Medical Centre and Karori Medical Centre.