

Improving the Indigenous patient journey

New programs introduced at Metro North Hospital and Health facilities are helping to ensure thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients receive culturally appropriate care.

Visiting a hospital can be an overwhelming and stressful experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but new programs operating across Metro North Hospital and Health Service are achieving positive outcomes.

Improving the Patient Journey (IPJ) and Indigenous Hospital Liaison (IHLO) programs are bringing a newfound confidence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients by giving them access to culturally appropriate care.

The IPJ program, launched last year, is already achieving great results for patients travelling from rural and remote communities across the state. In the three months from January to March 2015, 134 patients accessed the service from as far as the Cape York Peninsula to northern New South Wales.

The program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need to travel to Brisbane for medical treatment at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH) or The Prince Charles Hospital (TPCH).

A range of services is provided to assist patients and their escorts/carers throughout their health journey.

Once at the hospital, patients receive support from the Indigenous Hospital Liaison staff.

Director of the MNHHS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Unit, Angela Scotney, said IHLO staff act as advocates for patients and ensure they are treated in a culturally appropriate way when accessing mainstream services.

“Each month the Indigenous hospital liaison officers see an average of 500 patients for a variety of health conditions, including acute and chronic illnesses,” Ms Scotney said.

“We have now increased our after-hours services at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and The Prince Charles Hospital, which is particularly important as many patients come from outside of Brisbane and they don't have family support here.

“The programs are designed to make our people feel as comfortable as possible, to keep them connected with their community and ensure they don't feel they have to go home until they are fully recovered.”



Right: Safety and Quality Officer Natasha White with the Effort Tracker app.

Opposite: Carolyn Little and Evan Blackman are just two of the patients whose journey has been improved thanks to new IPJ programs.

Carolyn Little has visited the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on several occasions over the past few years to receive treatment for a kidney condition.

"The IPJ program is exactly what we need. It's a great initiative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to receive help when they travel to hospital and to feel at ease with the staff.

"We are independent people, but I'm realising we need to accept the help. It takes a huge weight off our shoulders to know we have assistance with travel and food expenses when we are at hospital. It's also reassuring that we have someone to help us while we are in the hospital through the Indigenous Hospital Liaison Service."



Metro North Hospital and Health Service's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Unit (A&TSIHU) is working on a pilot program designed to record the patient experience while streamlining reporting processes and to aid in improving quality of care and staff work efficiency.

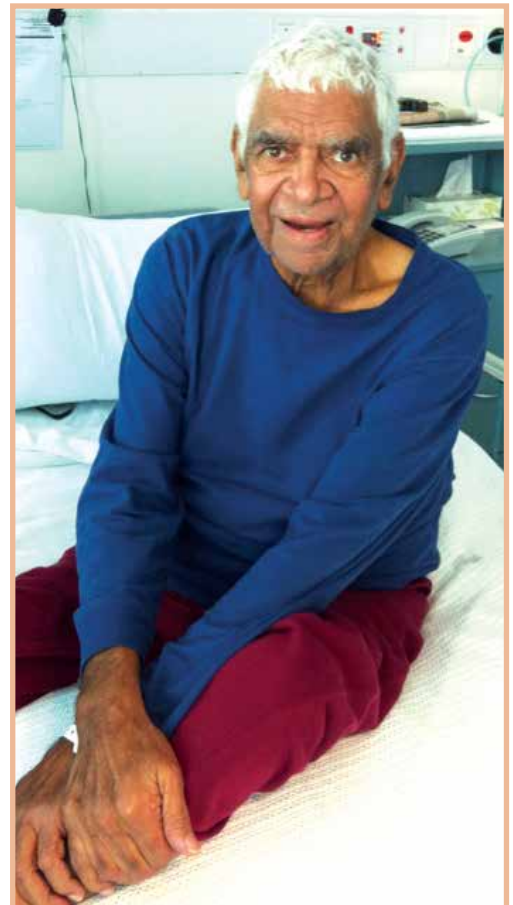
The Effort Tracker, will record on the spot accurate, relevant and timely data in regards to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders patient journey which will help inform service provision, resource allocation and policy development and to enable comparisons with non-Indigenous outcomes.

A&TSIHU Safety and Quality Officer, Natasha White (pictured left) said the custom-built application works across multiple platforms – computer, tablet and smart phones.

"The application will streamline the way A&TSIHU hospital staff, including Indigenous Hospital Liaison, Indigenous Patient Journey, Cultural Capability Officers and Safety and Quality services record patient information.

"Our aim is to support staff to accurately report against Key Performance Indicators to reduce "not stated" in the Indigenous identification, reduce the number of Indigenous people discharging against medical advice and reduce the number of potentially preventable hospitalisations."

The program is being trialled in June/July 2015, with the results to determine if the final product will be rolled out to all A&TSIHU staff across Metro North facilities.



Evan Blackman, from the Gorang Gorang country in Bundaberg, was transported to Brisbane recently for lifesaving surgery.

He settled in Nambour years ago and helped establish the Murri Court in Caloundra and Caboolture. It was here he met MNHHS Patient Journey Liaison Officer Robert Brown who was working with youth in the Caboolture area. Evan said he was pleased to see Robert and felt comfortable knowing Indigenous staff were on hand to help.

"I had four staff members sitting in my room the other day, all having a yarn. It was handy to know the Indigenous Patient Journey and Indigenous Hospital Liaison Officers were here to help. They checked in regularly to make sure I was OK and we discussed family connections."