



Mercy Health



Health and
Community Services



7,356
employees



85%
female



15%
male

Challenge

Mercy Health recognises the importance of having a workforce that is as diverse as its client base and this means attracting more male workers.

With almost 60% of the industry's direct care workers being 45 years or older and 36% of the current workforce within 10 years of retirement, there is also a need to attract younger people to healthcare. The organisation is also acutely aware that there will be a shortfall of 123,000 nurses across the industry by 2030 and that currently only one in 10 nurses in Australia are male.

Strategy

The main barriers to male recruitment are the stereotypes around the roles that exist in the care industry, as well as society's traditional expectations around the primary care-giver role and family perception of what is 'men's work'.

"Breaking down stereotypes is critical to attracting and retaining males to caring professions," says Adjunct Professor Stephen Cornelissen, Mercy Health Group Chief Executive Officer. "Not only does it provide greater diversity in the workplace, it also starts to challenge the stereotypes of male roles in society more widely."

As aged care shifts towards models of person-centred care, the aged care industry is looking for competency in areas such as emotional intelligence and the ability to empathise, which have become central to the aged care worker role. These traits have been traditionally seen as 'female' but Adjunct Professor Cornelissen believes it is time to acknowledge this capacity within men.

"These are the very skills required to excel in a caring profession and the ones that males have spent far too long hiding or avoiding for fear of discrimination or judgement." As one part of a long-range strategy, high school volunteering programs are a way of introducing males to the possibility of a career in caring.

Actions

Championed by Adjunct Professor Cornelissen, students from 50 secondary schools and five universities regularly volunteer at 22 Mercy Health residential aged care homes across Australia.

The program not only brings intergenerational benefits to the students and residents, it is a way of showcasing the variety of work in the caring industry – and how fulfilling it can be.

Students spend time with residents, some playing musical instruments, others helping residents send emails and navigate devices such as iPads or use virtual reality goggles. Having males experience the aged care environment helps highlight the diversity of roles and potential for career progression in caring that men may not know about.

The message is that the industry is more than just personal care, but offers a range of jobs including nursing, community/lifestyle co-ordinators, administration and management including marketing, HR, IT and property management.

Outcomes

As a result of the company acquiring a number of aged care homes and a recruitment strategy to attract more males, there has been an increase from 254 to 304 male carers in the organisation from 2015 to 2017.

In the same period, the number of males in nursing and midwifery in Mercy Health hospitals and clinics jumped from 174 to 280.

Mercy Health is also in the process of putting together a recruitment campaign for the expansion of Werribee Mercy Hospital to attract more males to the caring industry. The campaign will use images of males in job advertisements and the communications and social media strategy will feature stories from male staff members to promote the care industry.

Employee experience

Byron Macumber is in Year 12 and in training for a career caring for older people. He volunteers at the residential aged care home, Mercy Place Shepparton.

“We had a volunteering program at school in year 11 and I liked the idea of working with older people so I thought I’d give it a try. I didn’t know what to expect but when I got there I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to keep going with it. I’m in year 12 now and I go every Wednesday between nine and four.

The work I do is mainly diversional therapy which is working with people with dementia. I like doing activities with them that help to improve their cognitive function – to try and trigger a spark in their brain where they might say, “Oh I remember how to do that activity!” These kinds of activities can also help slow dementia degeneration.

The work involves doing exercises, chatting with them, playing games or doing puzzles. The residents don’t get to travel much and some don’t have many visitors, so the home has some virtual reality goggles where they can experience something different like being in Africa or going hot air ballooning. At first they can find it a bit frightening but once they get used to it they love it.

I’m currently studying for my Cert III in Individual Support. The course covers empowering older people, providing support to people living with dementia and meeting their personal support needs. It will take one to two years to finish depending on how fast I can get the coursework done and then, after Year 12, I hope to get a job here in Shepparton.

I like the work here because I enjoy communicating and spending time with people, getting to know them, hearing their stories and helping them. I also like the atmosphere, it’s quiet and relaxing and I don’t have to rush around.

There are mainly women working in the home, there are a few men, a mechanic and a doctor, but I don’t really think about it being a female-dominated workplace. I don’t think that any job should be classified as being for any particular gender – it should be about enjoying the job and finding a job the suits you.”



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Drill down into our data at data.wgea.gov.au to compare how industries are performing on gender equality.