

## Henderson Medical Centre

### Enhancing delivery of medical services

The Henderson Medical Centre is a large, comprehensive practice, which focuses closely allied medical services in one location.

Established in 2001, the initiative arrested a decline in patient numbers for individual GPs, and established a flourishing 'one stop medical shop' enjoying growth and cohesion.

Henderson Medical Centre (HMC) has four full-time partner GPs and a similar number of part-timers serving a growing register of at least 15,000 patients. It offers a pharmacy, dentist, physiotherapist and radiographer under the same roof and has visiting counselling and psychological services. HMC has enjoyed a 20 percent growth in its core register in the past two years, which is significant when many general practices are stable or declining.

With the investment funded entirely by partners, the management team ensures the facility works at maximum capacity. It operates on extended hours from 8 am to 8 pm weekdays and till midday on Saturdays and Sundays.

Partner Dr David Monks is frank about the reasons: "We have a substantial capital investment and want to see that investment working for us. Moreover we wanted to stem a stream of patients from our area moving to other health providers such as Accident & Emergency clinics.

"They didn't have the patient history and more importantly, didn't provide a continuity of care which we now practice."

The catchment of HMC is typical of any urban practice though with a richness and cultural diversity not found in every centre. Henderson in the centre of West Auckland has attracted almost every culture represented in New Zealand and HMC's patient register reflects this.

The blend of cultures and ethnicities – from Kurds, Asians, Maori and Pacific Islanders to refugees and recent migrants – offers a challenge to the practice.

Critical to keeping track of the patient diversity – and to enhance their welfare and care – is information technology.

"We run a practice management system with a substantial server and 19 terminals. Every room is equipped with a terminal, with doctors and nurses all having equal access. So the entire team has access to the medical database at all times."



Henderson Medical Centre,  
Dr David Monks

In addition to being a partner and GP, David is the IT practice co-ordinator for a primary health organisation, HealthWEST. With such credentials, he appreciates just how "fundamental" information flow is to the efficiency of the practice.

**"HealthLink is our communication to the outside world. It's that fundamental. It provides our electronic communication with external parties in the wider health sector to enhance our delivery of medical services."**

HMC gets electronic pathology reports from three pathology laboratories and radiology reports from a further three radiology providers. Equally important are discharge summaries and specialist letters from several medical specialists. It also uses HealthLink to send billing claims electronically to the Government funding agency (Healthpac) and the state-funded accident insurer (Accident Compensation Corporation).

In the arena of disease management, HealthLink is the vehicle for information transfer to government for a range of disease management programmes. Included are a national diabetes initiative, a regional hepatitis screening programme and the management of Kidslink, a national childhood immunisation drive.

Moreover HMC committed to SECURIT, HealthLink's broadband Internet security system, which enables the practice to go 'on-line' with the reassurance that private, confidential and sensitive patient information is secure. Safe and secure internet access means HMC can perform the current HealthLink services in a 'real-time' environment.

"Having secure electronic messaging for clinical data is top priority, especially when communicating with a primary health organisation," David says.

The practice values the ability to audit and track messaging as part of the electronic process.

"There's such a contrast to putting something in an envelope. In the case of something not happening, there are so many variables as to what might have happened. Was it posted, was it lost in the mail?

"With HealthLink, it is much easier to audit and track messages."

So could the practice operate without an electronic messaging capability?

"I guess it is possible but I don't see how it would function. So many of the services today are electronic. For GMS claims, it is now mandatory to make them electronic.

**"It is not a question of whether this is the right or wrong way to go...it is the only way to communicate in the health sector. Without it, it would be extraordinarily difficult to run the practice at all"**

David acknowledges some "risks" but quickly adds they are well-recognised risks. "We can take suitable strategic steps to minimise their impact on our services," he says.

While HealthLink's system is quick and easy, it also allows GPs to delegate claims and information flow to the administration team.

HMC is not entirely a 'paperless practice' as yet but David acknowledges the benefits of not having the time consuming filing of patient letters, records, charts, X-ray results and specialist and hospital information.

As more and more information comes in electronically via HealthLink, another time consuming practice is eliminated: scanning hard copies in order to file them electronically.

David says health sector adaptability to electronic messaging is happening quickly. "As practitioners enjoy the benefits, they will use it more and more," he says.

At HMC, at least two staff understand the technical interface between the patient management system and HealthLink's systems. That's imperative in any practice, David says.

Going on-line via SECURIT (HealthLink's Internet security service) brought immediate benefits. Firstly, the practice could immediately access a NZ Health Information Service (NHIS) 'unique identifier' for each patient.

Secondly David describes the on-line service as "a resource of information," an opportunity to check and identify all the services within the wider West Auckland health district. Included are primary and secondary care providers, hospitals, other health practices and clinics.

"It's reassuring to know we can enjoy full-time connection to the Internet with built-in security and protection of sensitive patient data. Constant broadband access is a significant step forward and SECURIT answers all the issues associated with that access."

It's a simple "set it and forget it" service without the need to give hackers a second thought.

So what is David's conclusion about the HealthLink partnership?

He's straightforward in his answer: "HealthLink allows us to function much more efficiently and to provide an overall better service to patients. It provides a prompt and regular update, which boosts our ability to keep up with the welfare of our patients."

"Their helpdesk is an important support resource: The fact we use it relatively infrequently speaks for itself."