

Hutt Valley DHB Summer Studentship: DHB Response

A new perspective for this new generation of doctors

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Dr Fitzmaurice is the Primary Care Liaison at Hutt Valley District Health Board. She was a GP for ten years in Taupo prior to commencing in this role in 2008. Liz works with others in the DHB to improve the integration between community and hospital medicine. She sees this summer studentship as a really positive workforce initiative and an opportunity for undergraduate medical students to discover the joys of the multidisciplinary team.

For the past two years Hutt Valley District Health Board (DHB) has offered four-week summer student placements for up to eight Otago 2nd and 3rd year medical students. The students are paid to spend time with Hutt Valley DHB looking at all aspects of medicine. Using a multidisciplinary approach, each student spends time with General Practitioners and a variety of other health professionals. This can include community workers and practice nurses, community and hospital occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, as well as hospital specialist consultants in medicine, radiology, surgery and anaesthetics and specialist nurses. There is a weekly debriefing led by a team of three senior medical officers (SMO) and the project leader, focussing on both challenging and rewarding experiences, and to help students come to terms with being intimately involved in another person's suffering. A one-on-one mentoring session was also added in 2010.

In essence, this summer student experience is a 'thrown in the deep end' type of exposure to patient care in both primary and secondary settings. The end of the four weeks does not mean the end of the Hutt Valley experience though, as the other key success of this project has been the follow-up of our students. The 2009 summer students were part of the presentation to Otago 2nd and 3rd year students in May last year. They joined the Hutt Valley team for dinner in May and again in August, when the team interviewed the next batch of hopeful candidates. This year the Hutt Valley DHB will encourage both years of previous summer students to join them for the presentation in May 2010 as well as for dinner with the team after the event.

The summer student initiative started in 2008 when the Hutt Valley DHB took a team to the University of Otago Medical School. We ran an evening where pre-clinical students heard from our house surgeons, consultants and general practitioners. The group introduced the summer studentship and the applicants were interviewed the following August. The students asked us, "What is the catch? Why is a DHB doing this?" Chai Chuah, our chief executive at the time, shared the secret at an informal barbeque dinner. He replied, "Some think it's to get you back to the Hutt Valley DHB when you are qualified doctors. The answer is much bigger than that. Our hope is rather, to get the Hutt into you." Hutt Valley DHB promotes a 'can do' attitude, so our team dreamed big and went all out. And, as is almost always the case when you try something new, the result has been surprisingly more than we expected.

Our aim was to give students the opportunity to enjoy being part of the Hutt Valley team. Our hope was that they would savour the experience of working in an interdisciplinary environment and learn from the professionals they meet. The difficulty of undergraduate training is the separation of hospital speciality rotations from general practice and community health. This gives a false impression that one discipline has little impact on the other. Our mission was to expand our students' thinking, to give them an appreciation of the power and, more importantly, the need for an integrated health system, a system in which community and hospital clinicians are working together.

Yet in saying all this, what no one could have anticipated was the impact the students would have on us. With their infectious enthusiasm and vitality, they reminded us why we had chosen this profession, and they left us with a sense of hope that in our old age we will be in good hands with this new generation of doctors.

In 2009 we had 64 applicants for eight places. This year we have applied for Workforce Innovation funding for a New Zealand-wide road show offering training and support to help set up similar initiatives across the country.

If you would like more information on the Hutt Valley District Health Board summer studentship experience, please contact: Iwona Stolarek Deputy CMA at Iwona.stolarek@huttvalleydhb.org.nz