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MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE SOUTH EAST HEALTH

Funding source: South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service

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Duration: 2003 - 2005

Description: The aim of Phase I of this research is to utilise the American "Racial/Ethnic Diversity Management Survey" with some modification for the Australian system. This tool has been validated and is being used to create a climate of change within the participating hospitals in Pennsylvania. In Phase II, results and views expressed in the questionnaire will be discussed through semi-structured interviews with executive directors and diversity coordinators of the nine facilities involved.

- The survey sought to answer the following questions:
- What is the attitude and experience of senior managers in South East Health to cultural and linguistic diversity?
- What is the current diversity profile of senior managers in South East Health?
- How effectively do managers feel their facilities operate in relation to diversity issues affecting planning, evaluation, training, human resources, health care delivery and progressiveness towards staff and clients of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander people and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background?
- What types of ethnic diversity management policies and practices exist among hospitals?
- How do management activities of senior staff tie into their strategic orientation?

Diversity management is a strategically driven process with an emphasis on building skills and creating policies that address changing demographics and patient populations. Health care organisations concerned about diversity management need to engage in human

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resources and health care delivery practices aimed at recruiting, retaining and managing a diverse workforce and developing culturally appropriate systems of care.

This study will assist South East Health to define its diversity management agenda and focus on key areas requiring action. It is essentially an organisational climate survey of senior staff and will require further validation through more intensive work with units. It will provide a baseline of management opinions and also a comparison with other Areas and overseas, that will allow the organisation to assess its position. Health services in New South Wales are seeing increasing numbers of patients from non-English speaking backgrounds. The need for health services to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care will not diminish, and indeed, will increase over the next decade. South East Health has a high immigrant population (31.2%), the majority of which were born in a non-English speaking country. Meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients, means ensuring culturally appropriate care, and ensuring equality of access and outcomes for all members of the South East Health community.

A more recent phenomenon in the health workplace is the increasing numbers of staff (professional and support) who are bilingual and/or bicultural. As workplaces become increasingly segmented along sociocultural and demographic dimensions, it is important to develop policies and practices aimed at recruitment, retention and management of a diverse workforce. Managers at all levels and health professionals must develop a greater understanding of human diversity and multicultural issues. This needs to go beyond being sensitive to or aware of such issues, to becoming competent in diversity management. Diversity management is the process or path leading to culturally competent organisations.