

2004

Year of the Roller Coaster Ride

Having been asked our opinion on numerous occasions on how 2004 will shape up it is time, we believe, to make a few pronouncements or predictions.

We make our observations based on how we see the 'state of play' happening as of today and with what is known. We readily admit that many twists and turns can happen in a short space of time.

With any discussion in aged care you have to deal with the lack of three essential elements; money, time and staff. We know of no organisation that purports to have a surplus of these.

In acknowledging those caveats we see 2004 as the Year of the Roller Coaster, so strap yourself in and be prepared for thrills, spills and anything but a smooth ride.

A few factors that need to be considered by all businesses in South Australia are increased costs associated with power supplies and upward moving interests rates. These may affect individual facilities to a greater or lesser degree.

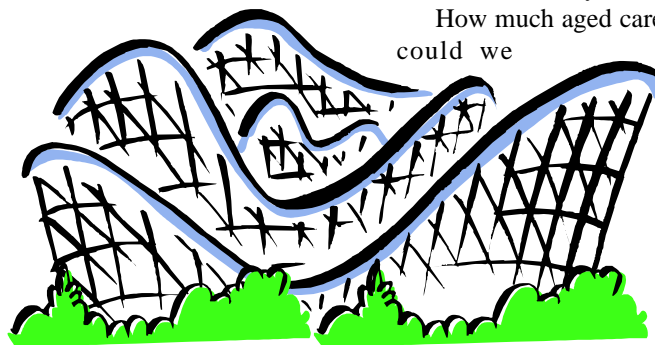
Money

Does aged care have sufficient money to survive?

Most reaction is NO, yet on the surface it would appear that the industry is not making this a pressing issue

to the public and therefore an issue for politicians.

The recent past CEO of Aged and Community Services did indicate at a Carers Conference hosted by N & C Baron & Associates in 2003 that it might be that a few places have to fall over before the situation is



brought to a head.

2004 is an election year and if money is an issue then everyone in the community should know that **today**. The message should be ringing in everyone's ears. Aged Care needs more money if we are to maintain an acceptable level of service to those in our care.

We are repeatedly told that Peter Costello does have a healthy surplus and is not sure where to put it. (Be nice now, that is not a professional thought.)

The public should know that if sufficient money is not present then residents in aged care will not be able to receive the care they require.

Little evidence exists

in the community that facilities may soon be falling over due to a lack of funding. Further if wages would be increased to match other sectors the potential failure rate will further escalate.

Other industries appear to be able to lobby much more effectively.

How much aged care could we

get for the price of a submarine?

Which is more important to the community?

Defense seems to be able to receive the money they need, so should aged care.

A recent luncheon with the Minister of Ageing, Julie Bishop, in Adelaide totally failed to make these sentiments known to her during the session.

If aged care wants more money they had better learn that it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease, and that gushing over politicians will gain little other than a warm fuzzy feeling that lasts about two minutes.

Time

At the above-mentioned luncheon, the Minister was quick to point out that efficiency gains were still needed in aged care.

Roughly speaking that means making do with less money, not more. When asked in what areas, she replied "technology". She may have been thinking of the use of robots instead of staff but more likely it has to do with computers.

The problem with computers is they have to be used effectively to be of value and they have to be able to carry out their duties. Recent examination of some computer systems would indicate that they are outmoded and of diminished use.

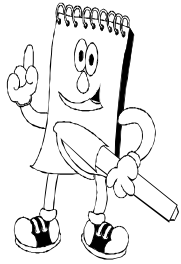
Precious time is being wasted by using outmoded systems. The result is that something that should be taking twenty minutes to do, may take an hour. But even more demoralising is that after spending the hour the person is so fatigued that further time is lost simply due to being drained.

Interestingly we always seem to see the better computers in the offices of the 'high ups'.

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A matter of trust, really.

Would you like to have something you have written or said published? Simply mail, fax or e-mail us a copy with your details and we will try to make it



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Recent discussions with senior aged care types from across Australia has well and truly caused us to question the whole notion of trust.

As a result of the release of our two new educational packages we have been many receiving questions and orders. No problems there, the more the merrier.

The problem comes up when the method of payment is discussed.

It appears that some DOCs and DONs are not seen as trust worthy or intelligent enough to be able to make small purchases without either going to their board or a proprietor to gain approval or get a cheque signed.

The amounts we are discussing here are most often under \$100.00. Incredible!

A recent call from a DON in New South Wales seeking further information indicated that she would require the approval of the proprietor before she could confirm the order for \$85.00.

Now that is truly a waste of resources. If the person entrusted to run the facility has to jump all those hoops

to provide education for her staff, is it any wonder that people are seeking employment elsewhere?

It is amazing that the same person who is not able to make these purchases can and does have responsibility for the well being of resi-



dents, manages numerous staff, ensures that controlled drugs are secure and holds the keys to the front door.

Some have indicated that they are so frustrated with the lack of a suitable system that they pay for items from their own pocket and then have to wait inordinate lengths of time to get reimbursed. If none of this sounds familiar to you, be thankful because it is happening.

So what should be acceptable industry practice?

The old notion of having a petty cash box usually

worked well. Sure there were issues of security and sometimes having everything balance but it did allow for small purchases not to take up excessive time or energy.

Of course everything costs more today and therefore a petty cash box might be unworkable. But the 21st century is near at hand.

Many places entrust their key people with a credit card so they are able to pay for day to day items. No fuss, accepted almost everywhere and you have a detailed statement with all the relevant particulars.

Yes there is always the potential to abuse the card, to purchase items without approval and to be frivolous. Just as there is the potential for pilferage on site, but we are talking trust here.

A credit card can have a limit placed on it so that control is able to be maintained.

It appears that sometimes we become so involved in the small details and the saving of cents that we don't see the dollars flying out the window.

Self Learning Packages, selling like hotcakes

Most staff in aged care report that mealtime and food is the highlight of their residents' day.

It therefore is very important that we do everything possible to ensure that they are able to partake and enjoy their meals.

We have recently completed two exciting video self-learning packages that will assist all staff members to gain a better understanding

of dealing with areas of concern in regards to food.

Understanding Nutrition & Hydration, allows all staff to gain a basic understanding of issues of nutrition and hydration including: Assessing residents needs, monitoring for problems, basic requirements and what is adequate.

The second package, ***Understanding Vitamised Meals***, covers the function of

a Speech Pathologist, warning signs & indicators for at risk residents and types of meals that are suitable along with hints, tips and suggestions on how to prepare these meals to reduce hidden problems and areas of concern.

Both packages come complete with easy to follow questions that staff can answer and return for documentation purposes.

Staffing –Why 'Measure Up'?

by Carla Baron

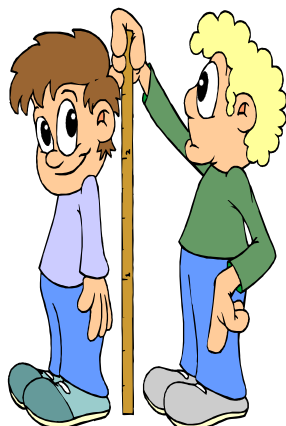
The success of the first N & C Baron & Associates 'Measure Up' program was attributed to its ability to provide facilities with practical information enabling them to demonstrate appropriate staffing and/or to identify areas where their staff numbers or mix could be improved.

Increasing staff costs and consumer expectation with the potential for litigation has heightened interest throughout the health care sector.

In Aged Care, the additional scrutiny of this area as part of the Accreditation requirements (Expected Outcome 1.6) adds to industry concern.

Over the past eighteen months two major organisations, the **Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care** and the **Australian Resource Centre for Hospital**

Innovations have undertaken major projects on this area publishing the results of an extensive literature search on staffing levels and a discussion paper on safe staffing.



Sadly the findings, in a nutshell, found little useful data to define appropriate staffing levels or mix and that there is no definitive 'best practice' methodology or benchmark. Therefore the area is currently a work in progress and reinforces the benefits of being involved

in relevant programs such as the current 'Measure Up' one.

Since 2002, the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) has used a 'nursing hours per patient per day' (NHPPD) methodology which developed benchmarks for various health care delivery areas including geriatrics.

These figures were used as the basis of the first 'Measure Up' review with NHPPD graphically represented against other participating facilities for ease of comparison.

A great deal more information about the comparative staffing was gathered and presented in table form.

Effective managers reported this information invaluable in assisting them in reviewing the ramifications of staffing patterns in all areas. This was especially obvious with regard to issues such as activities personnel,

clerical and other support staff.

Since the initial study, we have been approached several times to do a follow-up study. Hence, Round 2 which, by request, has been expanded to also include an RCS category profile for participants.

We welcome this opportunity to assist you by providing data which can help you to analyse your facility's staffing levels and patterns.

The time and economic costs on you are minimal, yet the results can be beneficial in giving you an understanding of where your facility sits in relation to your peers.

Seriously consider becoming involved in this valuable undertaking.

Please see the brochure for details.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Carla on 8276 9763.

Medication Management - a few seats left

Response to the one day seminar specifically designed to address issues of medication management in aged care on Friday January 30th 2004 at the Fullarton Park Centre, Fullarton has been most welcome and only a limited number remain.

Presenters including General Practitioners, Pharmacists, as well as

representatives from the Department of Human Services and the Australian Nursing Federation will be attempting to provide information and strategies to assist in making practical outcomes possible.

Topics that will be covered will include: Implementing Best Practice, Legislative

Update, Medication Errors, A General Practitioners Perspective, Administering Medication in ACF's and Teamwork to Achieve Positive Medication Outcomes.

This seminar is ideally suited for all aged care staff involved in medication issues. Doctors and pharmacists are also welcome.



Continued from page one

We know of one place that several staff have to share an antique machine, often coming in on weekends or starting early, while the 'high up' has access to a spiffy product with thin screen and all the latest wizz bang accessories. Is there a message there for everyone? 'High ups' are important and staff are not.

Computers should no longer be seen as luxuries, but as necessary tools for daily use and as such should be fit for purpose.

The use of technology should also be spread to the area of facsimile machines. We know of many places that have old and/or poorly operating machines that often require extra time to operate, often requiring an item to be sent two or three times. Again a poor use of time and resources. Some still lock

them in the office outside of 'office hours'. It appears that someone does not understand that aged care is a 24/7 operation.

This 'hand me down' mentality must end and diligent auditors should be ensuring that equipment that is fit for purpose is present under Expected Outcome 1.7 Inventory and Equipment - ***"Stocks of appropriate goods and equipment for quality service delivery are available."***

Staff

Repeatedly stated as the most critical area in ensuring that an aged care facility is able to provide the necessary care, it is also the area of greatest cost and most problems.

Simply put you need good staff in order to be able

to deliver good residential care, yet problems abound.

The ability to secure sufficiently qualified staff when required is becoming more difficult.

It is no secret that there are jobs available in aged care.

While it is great to demonstrate that jobs are available, it is critical that these opportunities result in sufficient staff being employed to meet resident needs.

While money is not the sole motivator for employment it is a major factor. Wages remain an area of great debate. While facility managers indicate they simply cannot afford to pay parity with their acute health care counterparts, it is quickly reaching the point where they can not afford not to.

Even the most loyal of staff become disillusioned with extraordinarily heavy workloads, increasing voluntary hours just to finish their work and then seeing their colleagues making a minimum of 10% more in their pay packet.

Smart operators have agreed to pay well above award rates. Those who have not are beginning to feel the effects with many staff leaving their residential service, choosing instead to provide aged care through nursing agencies.

The result is that the service still must pay higher costs in agency fees but have lost the advantages of continuity of care provided by a stable compliment of staff.

Unless this issue is more effectively addressed in 2004 residents will be the losers.

Important dates for 2004

April 28th 2004

Wednesday
Personal Carers
in Aged Care
One Day
Conference

Caring for
others,
neglecting
yourself



Especially for
Personal Carers

June 24th 2004

Thursday
Leisure and Lifestyle
One Day Conference

Clearing the Air
on Leisure in
Aged Care



For Diversional
Therapists, Lifestyle
and Activity Coordinators
and anyone who
wants a better understanding
of this important area

August 12th 2004

Thursday
5th Annual Thorny
Issues Conference

Aged Care
- Inside Out



The perennial
favourite that dares to
address the prickly
issues

Circle these dates
in your planner because
they are not to be missed
events.

We take pride in
ensuring that our one-
day conferences provide
good value for all
attending.

All three events
will be held at the
Education Development
Centre, Milner Street,
Hindmarsh; a venue that
has been acknowledged
through feedback as
being more than suitable
for aged care functions.

More information
in the next edition of
The Baron Report.
