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## The way of the future

8 February, 2012 Sarah Colyer 0 comments

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### MONTAGUE FARM MEDICAL CENTRE

#### The Smart Practice

Integrated, multidisciplinary preventive healthcare

#### What does it do?

Smart use of technology, multidisciplinary staff and preventive healthcare programs

#### How did it happen?

A practice manager with IT and business skills has been the driving force.

#### What happens next?

Registrar training and electronic health records are on the cards for later this year.



***"We use technology to enable best practice to be delivered efficiently to our patients."***

— Prashiba Thavarajadeva,  
Practice manager

A Google Talk message flashes up on the GP's computer screen and immediately she knows something is wrong outside.

It's from the practice nurse: "Toddler with a serious wheeze. Can you come?"

Dr Pat Janarthanan excuses herself from her consult and goes to meet the nurse and patient in the treatment room next door. The child is breathing loudly and rapidly.

The nebuliser is strapped on, but after three courses, the boy's oxygen levels are still falling.

The ambulance comes and takes him to hospital and all is calm again. The doctor returns to her interrupted consult with 65-year-old Margaret.

"Where were we? Yes, I was telling you about our free, eight-week weight-management clinic."

This is the way they do things at Montague Farm Medical Centre in Pooraka, SA, which combines the clever use of technology, multidisciplinary care and preventive health programs.

With a triage nurse, the waiting room sometimes runs more like an ED than a community general practice. But there's also a continuity of care here that is nothing like the ED.

The practice has been recognised with the RACGP's South Australian General Practice of the Year award for 2011.

Professor Nigel Stocks, chair of the RACGP SA and NT faculty, says the centre is "a fantastic example of how primary healthcare should be delivered in the community — through a holistic approach based around collaborative care".

The centre's philosophy is to enable every patient to see the doctor of their choice, on the day of their choice. Despite the challenges, they've found ways of making this happen.

"The harder we worked at managing our patients' chronic conditions, the more sense it made to work on prevention. We have a young patient population in a low socioeconomic region of Adelaide, so engaging this section of our community to share a proactive approach to their health has been the focus of our most recent efforts," says Dr Janarthanan.

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Patients can find five GPs, five practice nurses, a dietitian, physiotherapist, podiatrist, audiologist, mental health clinician, 'Do It for Life' healthy lifestyle counsellor, pathology collection and diabetes nurse educator — all under the same roof.

Patients are asked to fill out a health questionnaire while waiting for an appointment, while nurses at the centre have the autonomy to take patients out of the waiting room to offer preventive care.

This can include checking blood pressure, providing lifestyle advice and updating patients' family and social history.

Nurses have their doctors' confidence to get wound dressings underway. They can also perform child immunisations, under the proviso the child must also see one of the practice's GPs if they haven't done so in the past three months.

The practice has also seized upon the Federal Government's telehealth program and started conducting teleconsults with dermatology patients. So far, nine patients at the clinic have accessed a dermatologist within the week by way of a telehealth consult, and the practice intends to do more.

On top of all this, the practice runs free, eight-week-long weight clinics in the evenings, with involvement from the dietitian, lifestyle advisor, psychologist and GP Dr Tri Cao, who has a special interest in weight management.

The driving force behind all these initiatives has been practice manager Prashiba Thavarajadeva. With a background in business and IT, he has put a lot of thought into how the clinic can maintain the best of traditional family practice while benefiting from the customer service principles of the business world.

"We use technology to enable best practice to be delivered efficiently to our patients," Mr Thavarajadeva says.

Rather than interrupt GPs in consults with a phone call, the practice nurses and receptionists use Google Talk to send discreet instant messages. The centre also heavily relies on its recall and reminder systems to deliver about 500 recall letters each month, reminding patients with chronic illnesses of the importance of timely preventive care. Patients also receive SMS reminders of their booked appointments.

Dr Janarathanan says patient feedback is always very positive in the practice's surveys every three years.

"The one negative feedback we used to get was that patients didn't like having to wait up to 45 minutes. But we've fixed the problem since then," she says. She explains they have an unbooked slot after several patients — depending on the speed of the doctor — to give GPs time to catch up.

So what's next for the doctors and patients at Montague Farm?

The practice plans to take on its first GP registrars this year and has commenced building work to make room for them. But the next big thing will be the introduction of personally controlled e-health records, due to be rolled out by the Federal Government from 1 July.

Mr Thavarajadeva says the practice is looking forward to getting on board through the eCollaborative program run by the Improvement Foundation.

"The ability to give medical professionals the holistic picture of a patient's health status will have a great benefit for their continuity of care," he says.

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