

# Practice Nurses as Health Coaches



Sacha L'Huillier, co-author Karina Gardner

Melbourne East General Practice Network, PO Box 127, Blackburn VIC 3130 www.megpn.com.au Tel. (03) 8878 3755.

**melbourne east**  
GP network

Delivering local health solutions through General Practice

## Background

Health coaching is an evidence-based model for health behaviour change. It provides structured guidance for health professionals to help patients adhere to medical and health recommendations and to make health-enhancing lifestyle changes.

## Aim

To support general practice to embed systematic identification of lifestyle risk factors, risk modification approaches and self-management support into care delivery processes in regard to chronic disease self management.

## Method

Eleven practice nurses participated in health coaching training and implemented these skills. The goal for each practice nurse was to identify 10 patients and provide self-management support over a six month period. The practice nurses were provided tools for assessment and coaching. Practice nurses received ongoing individual support and group debriefing opportunities.

## Results

### Practice Nurse Outcomes:

Seven of the 11 practice nurses were able to recruit a total of 48 patients.

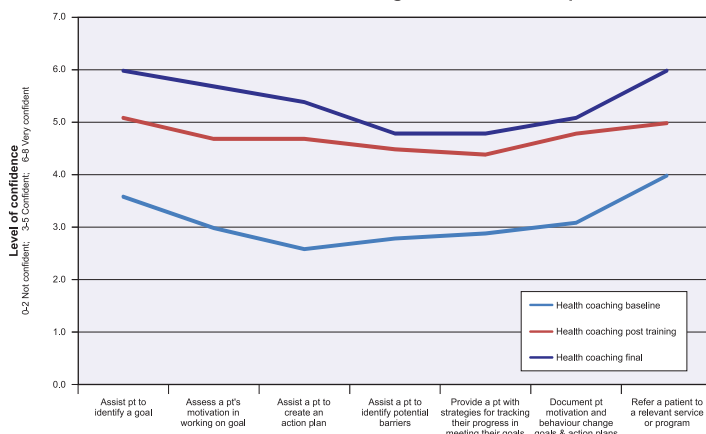
Key findings were:

- Practice nurses' confidence in using health coaching skills increased as the project progressed
- Barriers identified: GPs' lack of confidence and support in the nurses' ability to conduct self-management, lack of nurses' time and the competing workload for nurses

Recruitment challenges: not being supported by the practice to participate, concerns about the financial feasibility of a practice nurse conducting health coaching with patients and the requirement for the two day health coaching training was difficult for some nurses to negotiate to be out of the practice.

Graph 1 shows the increase in the practice nurses' confidence in their self-management skills as the project progressed

Assessment of Self-Management Skill Development

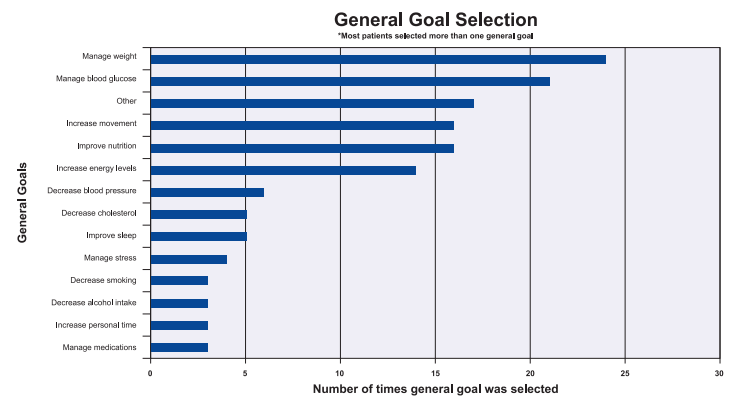


## Results continued

### Patient Outcomes:

- The goal most commonly selected by patients was to manage weight. The average BMI of patients fell slightly from 32.9 at baseline to 31.6 (n=16)
- Practice nurses received positive feedback from patients about participating in health coaching

Graph 2 shows the wide variety of general goals patients selected. Most patients selected the goal to manage weight.



## Discussion:

At the completion of the project all aims were achieved. Practice nurses were:

- Supported to identify and recruit patients in a more systematic way
- Provided with training and debriefing to gain skills to provide self-management support in practice
- Supplied with information about care planning and appropriate MBS item numbers and encouraged to implement these as appropriate
- Supplied with information regarding local referral options and community health services and encouraged to refer where appropriate

## Conclusions

Practice nurses were enthusiastic about health coaching, however more support from the whole practice would be beneficial. Better systems in practice are required.

**“Yes. Patients need support, space and time to positively change their behaviour. Patients have the right to preventative care and to be supported in their choices.”** Practice nurse

The practice nurses involved in this project have increased their capacity to provide chronic disease self-management. The majority were hopeful that with the support of the whole practice and better practice systems, they could continue to provide chronic disease self-management support in future interactions with patients.

## Acknowledgements

This project was funded by The Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health and Ageing. The project is part of the Australian Better Health Initiative Chronic Disease Self-Management/Lifestyle Risk Modification Grants Program.