

to understand and deliver exceptional customer service.”

Coxon believes the challenges of the changes ahead may prove too much for some of the current cohort of aged care managers.

“At end of the day, most managers in aged care are probably doing a good job in the current operating environment of passive service delivery within the regulatory framework to the standards required. But now we are changing the rules,” he says.

“In this future, you’ll have to develop the services that people want and you can choose how you want to run them. It’s not just internal compliance but responding to what’s happening outside your organisation and really understanding who the customers are. What can we offer? How can we deliver it profitably?”

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And if they don’t build those skills in the next couple

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of years, he warns, they could get left behind.

VISION ESSENTIAL

The Productivity Commission (PC) agrees. It’s recent report, *Caring for Older Australians*, it uses descriptors including ‘efficient’, ‘flexible’ and ‘visionary’ to describe the kind of management practices and workplace cultures required for the aged care sector of the future.

While the report calls for ‘a comprehensive aged care workforce strategy to be independently developed’, a consistent underlying message is that aged care providers will need to

become more competitive and creative in trialling and adopting new models of care and attracting and retaining skilled workers.

In the workforce section of the report [Section 14], the PC notes that, while current funding restraints are clearly linked to the sector’s problems in attracting, adequately remunerating and retaining good staff, there are, none-the-less, some providers who succeed in having very low staff turnover and minimal use of agency staff. The PC report says that both staff and managers from these organisations, when questioned, attributed their success to ‘good management practices’.

“The variability of management within the aged care sector is an important determinant of the attractiveness of individual service providers as places of employment – it is also fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of the industry as a whole, since high turnover rates reduce continuity of care for care recipients and the overall efficiency of labour and make it even more difficult to meet the demographic and skills challenges,” [Vol 2; p 358].

The report recommends management courses among the expanded skills development required to help meet workforce needs. It notes that, while there has been significant investment in improving clinical care skills, there has been less emphasis on developing management capacity.

“[...] anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of managers were formerly clinical staff with limited experience in management roles.”

Adapting to innovative models of care in the future, says the PC, will require strong leadership and

management capacity. The report says the adoption of assistive and information technologies, for example, may prompt new or adjusted care models but notes:

“[But] positive change will need managers who have the vision to develop and adopt new models of care, to set up rigorous trials, to evaluate their outcomes and to disseminate the results. This will require the development of leadership skills, including at the middle management level, to execute these changes successfully.”

BE PREPARED

The PC acknowledges there will be some casualties as providers adapt and adjust to a new and very different operating environment.

If the board and the management can’t adapt, agrees Coxon, “they may find that more progressive organisations will come along and overtake them”.

“Aged care providers need to look at the people they’ve got and their skills bases and they might need some change. Inevitably there will be some dinosaurs that don’t adapt and will die out. Anywhere where there is paradigm change there are inevitable casualties and they will be brought down by their inability to plan and adapt for the future,” he says.

Coxon advises managers to focus on core management skills which are building relationships with people; facilitating good discussion and communication; and coaching and developing the potential of others.

“Many managers can develop knowledge areas but the old model of the heroic manager who is supposed to have all the answers doesn’t work any more. The roles and the environment are too complex.

“You need to get past your own ego and have a good understanding of who you are and your own strengths and weaknesses and be able to ask for help when you don’t know the answers. Good advisers and mentors are critical - and so are the relationships - in being able to form judgements and make good decisions.” ■



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Improvements to payment statements

From November 2011, Medicare will stop providing paper payment statements and claim forms to services that have transmitted a full range of events* electronically over three months.

If you are a service that this change applies to, you will receive your last paper payment statement and claim form in October 2011.

For more information go to www.medicare.gov.au > For health professionals > Aged care > Aged care online claiming

*A full range of events refers to all events including finalised claims.

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