



(RE)DESIGN FOR LIVING

A frequently overlooked benefit of Health Care Home is the opportunity it provides for reassessment, for a bit of a shake-up. As well as its range of new tools, ideas and techniques, HCH also offers a chance for practice staff to step back a little, catch their breath and – sometimes – to look around at their workplaces. Why are things done the way they are? Why do people work where they do? Is the best use being made of the available space? Sometimes, too, better ways suggest themselves.

Such rethinks don't have to entail major building work or costly overhauls – sometimes it's scarcely more elaborate than rearranging the furniture, putting up (or taking down) a partition, or rethinking the workspaces. We spoke with three HCH practices who have recently been tweaking aspects of their design, looking to improve workflow, enhance patient experience and generally boost their feng shui.

Ruth Downs is the Clinical Nurse Manager at Team Medical, Paraparaumu, where she's worked since 2007. Of the re-designs we discussed, theirs was the most ambitious and costly, involving the largest amount of physical disruption. Asked what had prompted their first thoughts of a re-design, she says, "Well, the practice has been in the same building for the last 18 years, and parts of the internal dynamics were not working as well as they had at the start. The flow wasn't as good as it could be with the patients. I think there are a lot more patients now than there were back at the start, but also some of the building just feels a bit tired, if I can put it like that."



The team at Team Medical
Photograph by Karoline Stus

"Planning had been going on for a very, very long time – something like seven years – for a number of reasons. Also, there were some things that we couldn't change. For example, we have an x ray facility here that has to stay where it is. So, there were a large number of factors to take into account."



The new Team Medical waiting room
Photograph by Karoline Stus

Our motto is "Working together for your best health," and the old layout didn't maximize that potential within the practice. The GP clinics were at one side of the building and then the urgent care in the middle - so there were two reception areas for the clinics. It was often quite disjointed. The whole thing needed a rethink, really, and there needed to be a better flow within the whole practice. "The new design optimizes team work within, and encourages collaboration with our wider community. We have space for community groups and whanau groups to hui."

"Work finally kicked off late September last year, and the first (and biggest) stage is now drawing to a conclusion. In terms of Health Care Home, Lean principles are built into our thinking now, and we've considered patient flow a lot - where rooms are, what the layout is, what the flow is for a patient from waiting room to urgent care, from waiting room to a consult room, from consult rooms to various other parts of the building. We want to make sure that patients move about the facility in the most efficient manner, and in a manner that is the least inconvenient to them as they go from area to area."

“It’s all something of a work in progress,” she concludes, “And the success of it all won’t become clear until the dust has (literally!) settled, a few months down the line. But we have high hopes.”

Sometimes a change doesn’t have to be so big to make a big difference. With an enrolment of just 4,000, Brooklyn Medical is one of Wellington’s smaller practices, and it is housed in a correspondingly small building off Ohiro Road.

They joined HCH just over a year ago, and whilst Health Care Home aims to offer a wide range of solutions to help practices of all sizes get up to speed, it also comes with certain baked-in expectations – a bare minimum of physical changes expected in order to ‘kick-start’ new practices off on their journeys.

Dr. Lynn McBain, one of the practice’s GPs, wasn’t sure if they’d be able to follow the HCH protocol that calls for phone(s) to be taken off the front desk and put into a separate office space. “Given the size of our building, we just didn’t see how it could be done,” she recalls. The problem was that there simply wasn’t any office space behind or to the side of the Reception desk. “We had to create a new room,” she says, “Which we managed to do, after consulting with a local builder who’d helped us out previously.”



The newly created room at Brooklyn Medical Centre

A new wall and sliding door were put in place in a little over a week, with relatively minor disruption to the practice’s routine and, now that it’s up and running, the staff are loving it. “We’re already delighted with the way it’s improved the space,” Dr. McBain enthuses, “The staff love it. They really feel that it has improved their ability to get work done.”

Across town, in Miramar, Vicki Prebble is Practice Manager at Peninsula Medical. They were also having space problems, albeit on a different scale. “We had a range of changes we wanted to make both out front and behind the scenes,” she says, “We’d been thinking of doing something along these lines for at least three years, but after Health Care Home

came into play, waiting until we could get their input seemed sensible. I’m very glad we did, as it definitely influenced what we had done.”



The new Reception desk at Peninsula Medical Centre

The slow gestation of their plans gave them plenty of time to survey the landscape. “The directors and senior staff went to several other Tū Ora Compass Health practices, including Johnsonville and City GPs, to look at what they’d had done, and we got a lot of ideas from them,” recalls Prebble, “And we also spoke with Medispace, a national medical facility design outfit, who were very well up on HCH’s ideas.”

“What we’ve done is to redesign the front desk and the space behind it and the back to free up more administrative space. We also wanted to quieten the waiting room.”

“The work became part of our Year 1 plan – and we really had to push for it, as construction in post-quake Wellington is pretty challenging. So, we finally got going out front on the 30th September, just under the wire, and then on into Year 2. We had a good run through October, and they basically finished by the end of October.”

“The other big piece of work was turning what was originally three poky little offices behind Reception into one big space, creating some 10 working spaces from what used to be 6. No one can quite believe that we’ve done it, and it’s working very well so far. I feel much better connected to the team.”

A design rethink needn’t cost the earth, nor bring everything to a grinding halt. Properly planned and executed, it can make a big difference to a practice’s staff and patients.

- Martin Parker