

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Patient retrieval services benefit with new technology

After a successful trial on Palm Island, Queensland's Clinical Coordination centre (QCC) is set to begin 12 new telemedicine services around the state.

The Palm Island pilot linked the community's health clinic to the coordination centre in Townsville via video-link for three months from last September.

QCC Manager Beverly Rey said it exceeded their expectations. "The new technology was used extensively during the trial. One particular example of its success was a case where an adult male had had a fall and sustained ankle injuries.

"He was brought into the Palm Island health clinic and the doctors there were able to teleconference with doctors in Townsville – using video and audio technology.

"The Clinical Coordinator in Townsville could see his injuries and speak to the doctor on site in Palm Island and as a result, it was determined the patient didn't require air transfer and an appropriate patient management plan was put in place to observe him at Palm Island.

"It's better for the patient and takes the strain off us as well. It means more support can be provided to promote medical facilities and doctors in these areas.

"Distance isn't an issue anymore. Our ability to coordinate and plan has been greatly enhanced as a result," she said.

The Director of Statewide Clinical Coordination and Retrieval Services for the Townsville Health District Mark Elcock said the telemedicine trial allowed his team to get immediate advice to doctors on



The new screens. The screen on the left is the videolink between the two regions and the right screen is an electronic planning board containing the daily aeromedical tasks.



(L-R) Mark Elcock, Director, Statewide Clinical Coordination and Retrieval Services and Stephen Rashford, QAS Medical Director, using the new screens.

Palm Island in terms of resuscitation and also to make clinical decisions in terms of aircraft.

"We could then decide whether we needed to move them now or if we could prevent a retrieval or put it off till daylight hours.

"The benefits are not only clinical but also logistic – it allows us to be a lot more efficient with our resources.

"Building a telemedicine facility in the QCC in Brisbane is also on the way. We're going to roll-out telemedicine to a further six sites

in the north between now and July. Then after that, a further six sites will be linked up in southern and central Queensland.

"Which areas get the service will be determined by the number of transfers completed out of those places and the level of medical cover they have. "Ultimately I'd like to have a camera in the helicopters to help with patient treatment during the retrieval.

"We're also close to getting GPS satellite tracking on all aircraft. This means we could have their exact location up on screens.

We'd know exactly where the aircraft are, be able to plan road links, and ensure the safety of the aircraft, of the crews and efficiency of resource use," he said.

And that's not the only exciting development for the QCC at the moment. Teleconferencing screens and an electronic planning board are now in place. The teleconferencing screens connect the Brisbane and Townsville centres, allowing them to see and speak to each other in real time. Since all operational coordination is done in Brisbane, this allows them to consult directly with local doctors in the north.

Beverly Rey said this makes the process much easier. "All we have to do is look at the screen and we can see and speak to them through the audio system. It's as simple as speaking to someone in the same room; it's running all the time.

"It's just like we're looking through a window pane whereas before we had to use the phone. It was much more time consuming," she said.

The electronic planning board is projected from a lap-top computer onto a large plasma screen – showing data including where patients are and where the aircraft are.

"We've been able to build in a function of sending data from the monitor in Brisbane to one in the Townsville QCC through a high speed internet line. That way both areas can see what is on the board. It enables us to plan more effectively.

"On the planning screen we have the ability to manipulate data using our hands. We can annotate on the screen over data and maps to enable us to plan more effectively as well" said Beverley.

The Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme – helping Volunteer Emergency Services stay in touch in regional areas

Volunteer Emergency Services have the opportunity to receive a significant subsidy on the purchase of a satellite mobile phone thanks to the Australian Government's Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme.

The subsidy is part of the Australian Government's response to rural, regional and remote mobile telephony needs, and operates until June 2009. The Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme offers support to those living or working in areas that are beyond mobile coverage by allowing them to receive a subsidy of up to \$1200 towards the purchase of a satellite mobile phone.

Volunteer Emergency Services are one of the eligible categories under this scheme. If your Volunteer Emergency Services is located in an area without terrestrial mobile phone coverage, or regularly has volunteers spending time in such areas, you may be eligible for up to two satellite phone subsidies. Only Volunteer Emergency Service organisations that are not principally Government funded and which operate with predominantly unpaid, volunteer operational staff are eligible to apply for a subsidy.

Applicants must first apply and, if approved, can then purchase their phone through a dealer registered under the scheme. The price paid for the phone will be reduced by the amount of the subsidy, and the dealer is then reimbursed for the subsidy amount by the Australian Government.

The subsidy reduces the purchase price of a satellite phone only, and does not cover any ongoing charges or accessories. More information on the scheme is available at: www.dcita.gov.au/satphone, via phone on 1800 674 058 (free call from a fixed phone) or email satphone@dcita.gov.au