

Enhancing Care, Supporting Practitioners

Transforming Rural Health Through Telemedicine

Supported by My Emergency Doctor's (MED) innovative telemedical solutions, Terang & Mortlake Health Service (TMHS) is delivering exceptional medical care to its local community while preventing GP burnout – rebuilding community trust in the process.

TMHS serves a small rural population in Victoria's Western District, approximately 45 kilometres east of Warrnambool. Committed to nurturing a vibrant, healthy community, its portfolio spans acute and 24-hour

urgent care facilities, day surgery and diagnostics, palliative care, residential aged care, and a comprehensive range of nursing, allied health, and social support services.

Virtual Admission Service: Overview

Admission & Initial care

- A patient requiring admission is assessed by MED FACEM.
- A local GP takes over in the morning, or MED GP VAS steps in if unavailable.

Overnight Management

- Until 8 AM, MED FACEMs provide interim care for admitted patients.
- All medical notes are stored in the same system.

Ongoing Patient Care

- The assigned GP (local or MED GP VAS) manages the patient until discharge.
- If a local GP later takes over, a formal handover is required.

A Vital Resource

In the local community - home to farming families, an ageing population, and areas of socioeconomic disadvantage - patients often wait eight weeks to see a GP. Many inevitably end up at TMHS's nurse-led Urgent Care facility, sometimes far more unwell than they would otherwise have been.

Nursing staff face a difficult choice when a doctor is required outside regular hours: call in the overstretched local GP, delay treatment, or transfer the patient to a larger regional base.

"Timely access to quality medical care is crucial for our community, but, like other rural areas, we struggle to attract and retain GPs," explains TMHS Director of Nursing, Melissa Mitchell.

"Without an on-call GP, patients can't be admitted and have to be transferred to another facility 45 minutes away from where they live. We needed a solution that would ensure patients receive the treatment they need close to home, whenever they need it, while preventing GP burnout through better work-life balance."



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MED has helped
Terang & Mortlake Health Service to:



Prevent
unnecessary patient
transfers



Reduce
waiting and treatment
times



Increase
nursing staff confidence
and capacity



Reduce
burnout among local GPs



Restore
community confidence in
local healthcare

Key outcome On-Demand Service

83%

of UCC
patients treated
in situ after
MED consults



Answering The Call

TMHS piloted MED's FACEM On-Demand (FOD) telemedicine service – which provides rapid, around-the-clock access to senior medical emergency specialists via video call – in its Urgent Care department in 2020. Collaborating with the MED team to tailor the system to localised needs, the On-Demand service was enthusiastically adopted and quickly embedded.

"It's been a very smooth transition," says TMHS Registered Nurse, Gail Payne.

"The community have truly embraced it; they know that if they come to Urgent Care when there's no GP, this service is available to them and they'll get the treatment support they need without being transferred. It's rebuilt community confidence in the care we can provide."

The success of FOD soon led TMHS to add MED's Virtual Admission Service (VAS) to its suite of tools, enabling patients to be admitted for care and ongoing management in the physical absence of a doctor. Together, the services have become an essential and trusted component of care for TMHS and its local community, reflected in increased bed days, Urgent Care presentations, and staff skill levels.

"We can keep patients who need ongoing monitoring here rather than transfer as we know we can manage their care in its entirety with MED assistance. Our patients are relieved to be able to stay close to home, while our staff have confidence they can access a FACEM whenever needed," Payne adds.

Empowering and Supporting a Skilled Workforce

According to TMHS Nurse Unit Manager Liz Mioduchowski, GPs have welcomed the relief and support MED's service provides – a crucial element in retaining skilled physicians locally.

"They've seen it as an excellent complement to our service. It enables them to take time out over the weekend or switch to MED coverage when they feel overextended and burnt out, without guilt and without impacting patient care," she says.

Having emergency specialists available on demand has also allowed nursing staff to grow their confidence and skills.

"We recently had a patient present in terrible pain, but without ambulance cover it would have cost him around \$6000 to be transferred to Warrnambool. Encouraged and guided by the MED doctor, I was able to perform a procedure I had never done before, and it worked; it was amazing," Payne says.

"In situations like that, it's reassuring to know you can access excellent advice from MED FACEMs when you need it. You can give people the service they deserve when they're unwell, and quickly."



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“We're thrilled with the service – it has genuinely invigorated what we do here. Given the ongoing success and positive outcomes for the community, our staff, and GPs, our expectation and hope is that it will continue indefinitely.”

Melissa Mitchell
Director of Nursing,
Terang and Mortlake Health Service



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