

A HEALTHY BALANCE

Updating WA Health on Work Life Balance

December 2007



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Welcome to the premiere edition of *A Healthy Balance*, a newsletter updating WA Health employees on the latest in Work Life Balance (WLB).

Following the 2005 election commitment of “access and quality in our public hospitals”, the State Government released its Work Life Balance Policy (WLB Policy) to improve the working lives of WA Health employees.

A State Health Advisory Committee on Work Life Balance... Creating Family Friendly Workplaces (SHAC) was established to advise and make recommendations on policies, plans and work practices relating to WLB initiatives within WA Health, and the Work Life Balance + Equity Unit (WLB+E Unit) has been established and is being expanded to direct and implement these initiatives, as well as providing a support base for WA Health employees regarding WLB.

Achieving WLB within WA Health will require cooperation and open-mindedness, and is by no means an easy task. However, the WLB Policy (available on the WA Health WLB website) provides the ‘green light’ for employees to balance their work and life by offering a clear written statement in support of flexible working practices, in addition to those flexibilities included in the relevant health sector Awards and Industrial Agreements, and the Equal Opportunity Act (1984).

SO WHAT IS WLB EXACTLY?

“Work-life balance is about people exercising control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society”

(European Industrial Relations Dictionary)



SO WHY IS WLB IMPORTANT FOR WA HEALTH?

To attract and retain our skilled staff! If there are insufficient employees working in the health system, adequate care will be impossible to provide for the WA community. Promoting WLB is one way of encouraging talented people to join and stay within WA Health; offering employees the opportunity to balance their working life with their family, personal and social commitments.

Overview of Key Work Life Balance Initiatives

Work Life Balance + Equity Unit

A Work Life Balance + Equity Unit (WLB+E Unit) is being established with a whole of Health scope, based at the Department of Health, Royal St. More information on the structure of the WLB+E Unit is available on the WLB website. An advertising schedule is being prepared to recruit for the vacant positions, which will be advertised widely.

Accreditation and Data

The Accreditation and Data Working Group has established a set of measures against which improvements in WLB can be identified and measured over time. These measures include turnover, return from maternity leave, access to flexible work practices etc.

The working group is also developing an accreditation system for implementation across WA Health that recognises progress and the success of WLB initiatives.

Pre- and post-exit interview pilot

Pre- and post-exit interviews with departing nurses and midwives are being conducted by an independent provider across five health metropolitan campuses for twelve months.

The interviews, with staff members who have chosen to leave WA Health, aim to reduce employee turnover/improve retention, and provide an insight into the success of existing recruitment, training and management processes. The questionnaire seeks information on the clarity of the role performed, WLB and workload. The return rate for the current pilot is 53% and the age group most frequently leaving is 22-29 years.

A new pilot commenced on November 19 at Rockingham Kwinana District Hospital (RKDH) and also includes Murray District Campus. This survey is inclusive of all occupations and additional to pre- and post-exit, it includes questions around transition intentions for RKDH's expansion from 70 to 240-bed capacity.

"Work-life balance means different things to people at different times in their life cycle"

Training for Managers- Roll out of training module

Training for Managers on creating flexible workplaces was developed to open managers' minds to more flexible working options for their staff, and help them to implement these flexible work options more effectively in their workplaces.

Senior Medical and Nursing staff and HR/IR have commenced training already, with positive feedback from all involved. The formal Training for Managers program will commence in early 2008 with the appointment of the WLB Consultants.

WLB Research- Professor Barbara Pocock

WA Health is collaborating with The University of South Australia, Centre for Work + Life (headed by Prof. Barbara Pocock) and the South Australian Government on a Work, Life and Health Research Project. The project is obtaining ethics approval for each health site and will commence in 2008, to extend over three years. The collaborative and national approach to the research ensured a significant three-year ARC Grant. The project was also nominated in November for a Commonwealth Business/Education Award.

Complete work life balance trial

Alma St, Fremantle will be the pilot for the complete WLB initiative, commencing once the WLB Consultant is appointed for the SMAHS.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY UPDATE

The whole of Health Equity and Diversity Working Group has recently revised the WA Health Equity and Diversity Plan to include specific strategies to retain mature age employees in the workforce. The Plan is available on the Health Workforce Link at:

<http://intranet.health.wa.gov.au/hwl/equity/index.cfm>

A whole of Health policy on Equal Opportunity and Diversity is currently being developed and the existing Policy on the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination is being revised.

Key WLB Initiatives (cont.), *Balance* back page

Phased retirement

Phased retirement is of increasing interest to older employees seeking options for flexible working practices. Currently, the median age of the WA Health workforce is 44 years, and 62% of employees responding to the 2006 WA Health Retirement Intentions Survey indicated plans to retire within 10 years.

The consultation process for the Phased Retirement Policy has concluded and is proceeding to the endorsement stage. Three pilot sites have volunteered to trial a range of initiatives.

Childcare

A WA Health Child Care Program has been developed in 2007, comprising a statewide network of childcare services for children from 0-14 years. The program will be managed by an incorporated not-for-profit, non-government organisation to administer childcare for the whole of WA Health.

The RKDH expansion will include a new childcare centre on site offering long day care, before & after school care and vacation care. It is due to open in mid-2009. The WLB+E Unit is working collaboratively with RKDH to ensure a best practice model for the whole of WA Health.

Vacation care at RPH is at full capacity with the October opening of the new facility on campus.



JOIN The Work Life Balance Network

Become a member of the Work Life Balance Network by visiting the WLB website. Choose 'Work Life Balance Network' (under Employees and Prospective Employees) for more details and sign-up information

OTHER CURRENT WLB INITIATIVES IN WA HEALTH

- A Breastfeeding Policy has been approved for the whole of WA Health
- The WLB+E Unit made a recent visit to Bunbury and Margaret River Hospitals to meet with senior staff and further promote WLB strategies across WA Country Health Services
- Dental Health will be part of the DOCEP WLB project
- DOCEP will publish a WLB newsletter called *Tipping the Scales* and WA Health has been encouraged to participate
- The DOCEP Pay Equity Unit is working with WA Health to examine the existing gender pay gap. Strategies will then be developed and implemented that narrow the gap.

NEW/COMING SOON to the WLB website:

- Research report from the Centre for Work + Life (Uni of SA) on the Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI)
- WLB Network Members contact details to discuss WLB related issues with each other
- Success stories, including how Rosa Cameron, Manager of Breast Screen is helping her staff improve their work life balance.
- Work Life Balance Poster presented at the October 2007 WA Health Conference

STAY TUNED IN 2008 FOR THE NEXT EDITION
OF *A HEALTHY BALANCE*

Visit the Work Life Balance website:
www.health.wa.gov.au/worklifebalance