

HOSPITAL



AN UNHEALTHY BUSINESS

The story of a hospital whose challenge is to reconcile its mission to serve the people in a time of limited finance.

A story of a struggle to deliver more with less.





Hospital – an Unhealthy Business, investigates a public hospital's struggle for economic survival. It weaves the story of administrators at St. Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne and their attempts to bring in a balanced budget, together with the stories of three patients whose care might be jeopardised by the pressure to cut spending and increase patient throughput.



The need to increase throughput and the subsequent pressures on the staff come to a head in winter, with four weeks to go until the end of the financial year.

The four hundred bed hospital attempts to do the impossible - to treat around nine hundred patients every week.

However, the treatment and care of patients is a complex issue and often unpredictable. For instance, 80-year-old Mrs Biggs has been admitted suffering from a stroke and it is uncertain how long it will take for her condition to stabilise; Robyn Watson has an aggressive cancer and the price of her treatment is mounting, costing a great deal more than the hospital receives back from the government; and Mick Nash, a patient admitted with chest pain of increasing severity, waits in pre-op while a debate ensues in management to consider rationing the very procedure Mick is about to receive.

As management continued to try and cut spending, the treatment of patients like Mrs. Biggs, Robyn and Mick, was increasingly

viewed by the accounting department as not viable ...but nursing staff, health workers and doctors do not agree.

Staff at St. Vincent's push themselves to the limit to minimise the effects of budget problems on their patients. Debates rage, tension mounts and the budget problem starts to take its toll. Will their efforts be in vain?

The crisis facing St. Vincent's, like public hospitals all over Australia, is that they are being forced to prioritise those services that are the most cost-effective.

With this kind of financial philosophy at work, will health care itself become the main casualty?

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