
FACT SHEET - HUDDLES

WHAT ARE HUDDLES?

Consider these situations:

The All Blacks are playing against South Africa. The South Africans are marginally winning and about to kick a conversion. What do the All Blacks do?
They huddle and discuss team strategy.

It's Monday morning at the Healthy Family Medicine Clinic, and the phones are ringing frantically. Staff know the day will be busy, so what is the first thing they do?
They start seeing patients right away.

Huddles (as illustrated by this example) are a means of taking a strategic and structured approach to pressurised situations. They enable the players (in our case members of the general practice team) to step back and form an overview of the situation (the day ahead for the team or practice), before they plunge into the thick of it. By huddling (and taking this high-level practice-wide view) team members can rapidly develop ways to deal with any crises, unforeseen events and special requirements that the day may contain.

Huddles involve the practice team meeting daily at set times to discuss a limited range of topics. They are short focused meetings where issues and concerns can be raised and dispatched. As such, they are efficient means of smoothing out the pressures that general practices face on a daily basis, without leaving individuals to battle out difficult situations on their own.

HOW TO HUDDLE

Depending on the size of your practice, there may be two levels of huddling.

In smaller practices, where the entire practice works as one team, members will huddle on a daily basis. Occasionally these huddles will take longer to discuss other topics, but in general they will be short meetings focused on the daily business at hand.

In larger practices, each clinical care team will huddle daily, in the same manner as for smaller practices. In addition, once a week there will be a whole of practice huddle. With this larger huddle only two or three people from each team will attend, to report for and back to their team. At the weekly huddle, members will discuss practice-level issues, and highlight any problems occurring in their team that may affect other teams or where other teams may be able to assist.

In the beginning, huddles are something that teams and practices will have to plan for and will require a leader or champion (it is best if this person is a doctor or office manager). Over time (usually within a couple of weeks), huddles will come to be second nature and a defining part of the day, where everyone gets their say and the practice's work load is planned and maintained.