

VICTORIAN MANAGED INSURANCE AUTHORITY (VMIA) RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAM TRIAL FACT SHEET

As part of VMIA’s Research and Innovation Program, BehaviourWorks Australia conducted seven behaviour change trials between 2017 and 2020. These trials explored how simple, scalable interventions could reduce avoidable risks in delivering healthcare in Victorian public hospitals.

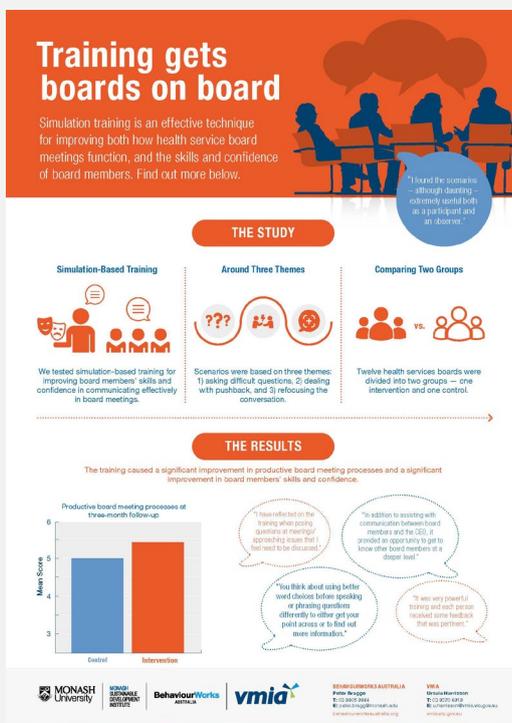
SUMMARY OF TRIAL 7: Communication in the boardroom

It starts at the top: Can practising difficult conversations with a professional actor build skills and confidence among health service board members?

Background

Health service boards oversee the operation of hospitals and individual board members are responsible for navigating a range of complex health and safety issues to ensure patient safety. Thus, it is essential they have the skills and confidence required to effectively share information, communicate concerns and engage in difficult conversations when needed. The consequences of not doing so can be fatal.

For those new to the board setting, there are relatively few opportunities to practice and develop these skills in a controlled environment. The purpose of this behavioural trial was to test if simulation training with an actor could help.



What did we do?

We tested the effectiveness of a two-hour workshop. The trial involved 12 health service boards randomly selected to either attend the workshop or act as a control group.

During the workshop, each health service board member practised relevant conversational strategies, including having difficult conversations, with a professional actor under the guidance of a trained facilitator.

What did we find?

Three months after attending the workshop, health board members reported significant improvements in their skills and confidence in communicating effectively during meetings and in mandated meeting processes, compared to the control group.

See full size infographic page 3.

What does this mean?

For patients

If more board members have the skills to ask difficult questions in health service boardrooms, patient safety can be improved and the likelihood of tragic outcomes, including avoidable deaths, can be reduced.

For VMIA

There is research to suggest a well-functioning board that prioritise patient care and safety will have better outcomes. Simulation training allows participants to build and practice communications skills in a protected environment. This trial allowed simulation training at a board level for the first time and the results were positive – board members felt empowered to ask the hard questions and expand discussions with their executives to deliver improved patient care.

For the health service

“Often when you read the transcripts from court cases where things have gone horribly wrong, the directors of companies will say. ‘I did wonder about that’ but for whatever reason they don’t ask the question ... the questions that we learned [as part of the training] will be really helpful in terms of having the confidence and ability to actually ask the difficult questions.” - Marie Aitken, Chair of a Victorian Health Service Board who participated in the workshop.

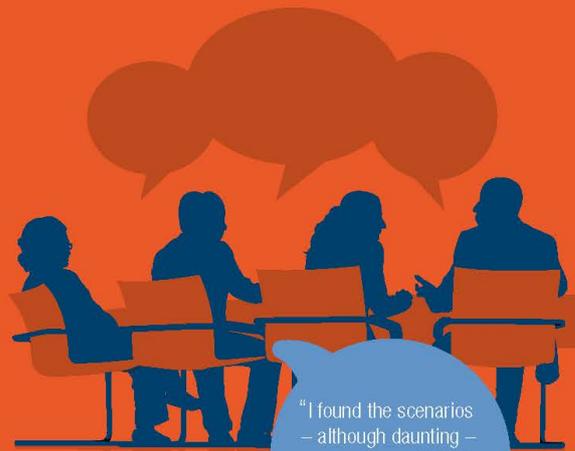
For behavioural science

This is the first known randomised controlled trial of simulation training for health boards in the world. The positive results reinforce that key communication skills are best developed through real-time practice in a safe environment.

For further information, visit: <https://www.behaviourworksaustralia.org/victorian-managed-insurance-authority/>

Training gets boards on board

Simulation training is an effective technique for improving both how health service board meetings function, and the skills and confidence of board members. Find out more below.



"I found the scenarios – although daunting – extremely useful both as a participant and an observer."

THE STUDY

Simulation-Based Training



We tested simulation-based training for improving board members' skills and confidence in communicating effectively in board meetings.

Around Three Themes



Scenarios were based on three themes: 1) asking difficult questions, 2) dealing with pushback, and 3) refocusing the conversation.

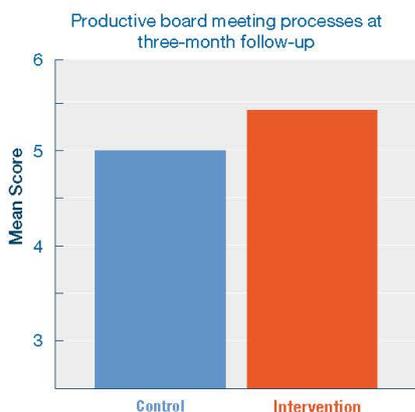
Comparing Two Groups



Twelve health services boards were divided into two groups – one intervention and one control.

THE RESULTS

The training caused a significant improvement in productive board meeting processes and a significant improvement in board members' skills and confidence.



"I have reflected on the training when posing questions at meetings/ approaching issues that I feel need to be discussed."

"In addition to assisting with communication between board members and the CEO, it provided an opportunity to get to know other board members at a deeper level."

"You think about using better word choices before speaking or phrasing questions differently to either get your point across or to find out more information."

"It was very powerful training and each person received some feedback that was pertinent."

