In February 2014 the Emergency Care Clinical Network began its sixth round of evidence-based improvement projects in emergency departments. The aim of these projects is to enhance the use of evidence-based care, reduce unwarranted variation in clinical practice and improve consistency of care within emergency departments.

Why this project was important to our emergency department
- To have a consistent approach to recognising deteriorating patients in the emergency department
- To have a consistent response to deteriorating patients in the emergency department
- To improve patient care
- To address the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 9 Recognising and responding to clinical deterioration in acute health care.

What we did
- Consulted with clinical expert Professor Julie Considine
- Two staff members attended an external training session on managing the deteriorating patient in the emergency department
- Developed and implemented clinical deterioration parameters within the department
- Developed and implemented a medical emergency team (MET) response process
- Established clinical champions
- Developed posters and displayed them in the department
- Improved medical emergency team documentation
- Provided education to 43 staff members through 10 formal and informal education sessions.

Our results
- The proportion of unstable patients where this was reported for action increased from 33 per cent to 100 per cent
- The proportion of patients where escalation pathways were followed was 100 per cent.

What we learnt about improving quality of care
- Use of clinical experts’ knowledge stimulated robust staff discussion
- Small adjustments to the existing informal clinical practice made a difference to practice
- Constant updates by clinical champions and nurse unit managers provided staff with information to assist in changing practice
- Providing clarity on the criteria to activate a response to deteriorating patients increased staff confidence
- The project lead not having adequate time and conflicting rosters impacted on engaging staff in the improvement project
- Allocating project team members’ roles and responsibilities early in the project enhanced the project’s success.

Impact on patients, staff and the health system
- Improved patients care in line with best practice
- Increased staff confidence in managing deteriorating patient
- Improved documentation and communication
- A consistent approach to management of the deteriorating patients in the emergency department.

‘Fantastic we now have a process’ – staff member

2014 Evidence-based care project – Emergency Care Clinical Network