

# SATISFACTION

## *Success Story*

Providing Emotional Support  
Through Technology Solutions

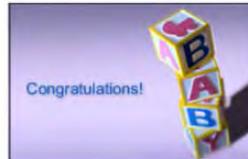
### *Patient eCard*



#### **Patient eCard**

Use this page to send a special message to friends or loved ones staying at St John of God Hospital.

Click on one of the images below to select a picture to include in your message.



**ST JOHN OF GOD**  
HEALTH CARE

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ACHIEVEMENTS WE ALL CAN LEARN FROM



## The St John of God Health Care - Patient eCard

### Providing Emotional Support Through Technology Solutions

Patients and their families want what any of us want: a normal life in which they have control over their health, relationships, personal needs and lifestyle. Unfortunately, severe ill health requiring hospitalisation has a profound short and long-term impact on our lives. Additionally, bringing new life into the world while being a cause for celebration, also necessitates putting our trust in a healthcare system, increasingly under media scrutiny.

Families experiencing the traumatic events surrounding diagnosis, treatment and hospitalisation have both complex clinical and emotional needs. As the patient and their family progress through the multi-layered interactions and processes they are extremely anxious, exhausted and afraid.

This impact is compounded if access to emotional support from family and friends is constrained by geography and the ability to travel to a facility.

With hospital lengths of stay averaging 3 – 5 days it is often difficult for relatives or friends to make the personal visit to provide this support. Traditional methods of sending letters and cards from well-wishers means messages often arrive after discharge.

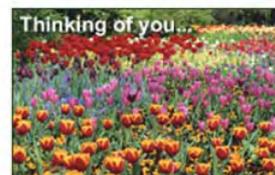
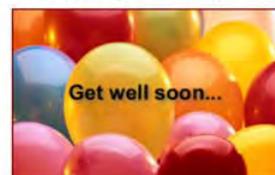
One of Australia's leading healthcare providers, St John of God Health Care, has successfully bridged this important support gap by implementing an innovative solution, incorporating web-enabled technology, known as the **Patient eCard**.



#### Patient eCard

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## What is the Patient eCard?

The Patient eCard system allows family and friends to send a special message electronically to loved ones staying at St John of God Health Care's hospitals. Users can choose from six card designs, spanning a range of messages including: "Thinking of you"; "Get well soon"; and "Congratulations".

## Where the eCard fits in St John of God Health Care's commitment to improving patient services

St John of God Health Care (SJGHC) is a leading provider of health and community services, with 14 hospitals, pathology and outreach services throughout Australia and in Christchurch, New Zealand.

As a component of the organisation's Mission (to continue the healing mission of Jesus Christ through the provision of health care services that promote life to the full by enhancing the physical, intellectual, social and spiritual dimensions of being human), SJGHC focuses on providing "excellence in care meeting community and individual needs".

As Group Chief Executive Officer Dr Michael Stanford shares – *"Patients expect our healthcare provision to be world class, delivered by highly trained staff. They also want to be reassured that the care provided meets the important service aspects of care, particularly the communication, courtesy and compassionate elements."*

The ability for family and friends, including those interstate and overseas who are unable to visit in person, to send messages to their relatives and friends contributes to these organisational objectives.

## Where did the idea for the Patient eCard come from?

St John of God Health Care's website project team, then headed by former Group Director Marketing & Public Relations, Rebecca Steffen, felt that using web-enabled technology provided an innovative, unique and creative way for a patient's family and friends to reach their loved ones and decided to incorporate the facility into the new website. Research was conducted into websites with similar functionality and "E-healthcare" newsletters and the like were analysed in relation to innovation in web sites.

Rebecca explains: "From the research it was found that another health care website had successfully implemented an eCard system for their patients." This formed the conceptual framework for progressing the initiative.

## How was the eCard system designed?

The current St John of God Health Care (SJGHC) website was launched in March 2004 and as a result of the research undertaken to develop the site, the Patient eCard page was incorporated in the design of the website.

The eCard was designed in conjunction with a graphic designer, who supplied the images for each of the card categories (Get Well x 2, Congratulations on baby x 2, and Thinking of You x 2). The actual card was developed using the Oracle Portal application similar to the rest of the website.

## The Patient eCard process - from web entry to handing to the patient

The process from web entry to patient is profiled below:

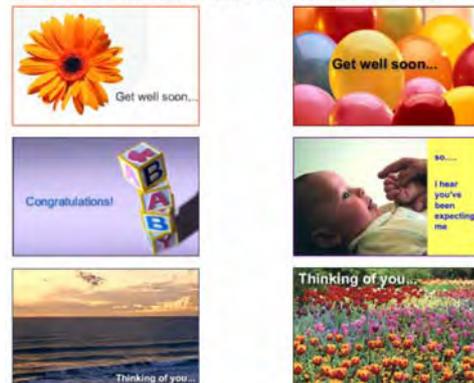
- Relevant hospital sites have a menu item entitled "Patient eCard";
- Visitors click on the menu item and a page is displayed with the 6 images for the various cards;
- Visitor clicks on the required image to select it;



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- A new page is displayed showing the image selected and an online form with the fields "To", "From" and "Message"

### Send a Patient an ECard

Just enter their name into the 'To' field, put your name into the 'From' field, and then type your message into the large box underneath. Once you are happy with your message, click on the 'Send' button at the bottom.

- When the fields are completed the visitor clicks the send button.
- A confirmation message is displayed to the visitor stating "Thankyou. Your eCard has been successfully submitted."
- The card is sent to the Hospital's Reception email account.
- The email contains a URL that when clicked on displays a web page with the image and message.
- This is printed out by the reception staff (preferably on a colour printer) and is sent to the patient via the internal mail system.

## What has been the patient/family reaction?

In the past few years close to 1,500 eCards have been received and handed to patients. "Overall, the reaction from patients and families has been very positive," Rebecca said. "It has been particularly beneficial for those that have friends and family interstate and overseas who can convey their best wishes and thoughts to loved ones in a unique, creative and non-conventional way.

"A recent maternity patient at one of our hospitals, Nicole Kendall, received two eCards on the day she gave birth at St John of God Hospital, Geelong and was thrilled to receive them. One of them was sent to her by a friend from New Zealand," Rebecca said. "It is a great service to have available for patients. It was really nice to receive an eCard," Nicole said.

## What has been the staff reaction?

Staff members have been very positive as they can see the benefits this provides to their patients. Fiona Athersmith, the Group Director Marketing & Public Relations, says: "Although it may seem a simple task, each time we engage with our patients at this emotional support level, we are reinforcing our commitment to our mission".

## What obstacles did you need to overcome and how did you address these?

Besides minor technical issues, one of the main obstacles was the issue of some of the group's smaller hospitals not having access to a colour printer at reception. Many of the hospitals have purchased colour printers for this, but some still print in black and white. However, overall the introduction of this patient eCard system was and continues to be well received by all involved.

## What benefits have you seen since implementing the system?

Patients are able to receive messages from family and friends who are interstate, overseas, unable to visit them during their stay in hospitals or merely letting them know they are thinking of them. With individuals being time poor in today's society, the patient eCard allows people to reach their loved ones in a quick, thoughtful and creative way. It is also providing one more service to patient's families and friends and linking in to the increasing use by the community of web-based communications.

There is a certain satisfaction that staff feel when passing on these eCard messages to patients who, more often than not, do not expect to receive such messages.

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Further information:

- Fiona Athersmith, Group Director Marketing & Public Relations, St John of God Health Care, [fiona.athersmith@sjog.org.au](mailto:fiona.athersmith@sjog.org.au) or (03) 9205 6500



Mrs Nancy Burton of Narre Warren in Melbourne with an e-card at St John of God Nepean Rehabilitation Hospital