

HEALTH SERVICES AUSTRALIA

Health Services Australia (HSA) is Australia's largest national provider of work-related health and safety services. Their experience and expertise in medical and health assessments is unparalleled in the country. HSA is wholly owned by the Australian Government and is accountable to its shareholders, the Minister for Finance and Administration and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Aged Care. It is managed by an independent Board of Directors, responsible for developing strategic objectives.

HSA is a leading provider of health assessments and health and safety advice in four key areas:

- Eligibility assessments for Government Benefits
- Migrant Health
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Travel Health

HSA's experience in health assessments is unmatched in Australia. Its health and safety advisory services cover a multitude of areas including ergonomics, workers compensation, managing hazardous agents, stress management, safe travel and general advice on leading a healthy lifestyle.

HSA also runs an extensive occupational health and vaccination program including Q fever, influenza and hepatitis and as part of travel health services, provides vaccinations and anti-malarial medication for people travelling to risk areas, overseas.

The workforce of more than 400 permanent and casual staff (300 FTE's) strives to provide clients with innovative, cost effective quality services delivered by client focussed professionals. A multi-disciplinary team of in-house specialists including occupational physicians and nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists undertakes medical services.

Established in 1997, HSA has the widest national coverage of any occupational health and safety provider in the nation. Staff are employed in 13 offices located in every capital city and a number of regional centres around Australia. The head office is located in the national capital, Canberra.

HSA's ability to service clients beyond the cities into remote and rural areas is made possible through an established network of medical practitioners approved to undertake HSA related work (AMP's) and a nurse outreach program providing services to areas not covered by Doctors.

The diversity of employee roles, coupled with the dispersed geographical location of staff and the complexity of labour agreements makes for complex payroll and human resource requirements.

This scenario accompanied by the attendant requirements for meaningful information from a professional management team, demands effective human resource management through a flexible and responsive software system.

In recognition of this need, HSA originally contracted with a leading international developer of Business Solutions to implement a Financial and HR software system. We should note here that this article refers to the HR solution alone.

Some 18 months later, HSA was faced the requirement to upgrade and implement a new version of their Payroll/HR system. In the interim, the chosen solution had failed to deliver to the expectations of the Company. HSA Manager - Support Services, Bob West, determined to investigate the market to ascertain whether an alternative software package might be sourced which could deliver the system requirements ahead of real dollar savings against the projected expenses of upgrading.

Bob West recognised that his company had committed significant funds to the existing system but chose to look at the picture from a long-term perspective. Following a period of exhaustive examination, Australian-owned and based Frontier Software was chosen to supply their product, CHRIS (Complete Human Resource Information System) at **ONE –FIFTH** of the cost to update and upgrade the existing system.

Given cost reductions of this magnitude, Bob West's decision to change was vindicated but the real justification for change came with the flexibility and functionality of the CHRIS system.

Personnel Manager, Roy Bailey commenting on the implementation of CHRIS said, "The whole Frontier implementation methodology is impressive from the disciplines involved to the method of training by consultants preceding testing by staff. CHRIS was implemented within four months which included interfacing back to the Financials of the original package."

With the former product, consultants worked extremely long hours with one consultant being employed on the project, working seven days per week for a period of six months. That implementation took 12 months to complete.

The structure of CHRIS appears to be the key to the implementation task. As Personnel Officer, Jeff Power notes, "With the previous product, you don't buy the system, you build it – from the ground up. All along an IT person is needed to configure the system"

Under CHRIS, the Frontier Project Manager, Justin Corcoran completed most modifications, required to fit with the special needs of HSA, without the need to involve either internal or external IT specialists.

Leave Management under Australian awards and labour practices is an area which is complex and Payroll/HR software developed overseas rarely manages this area well.

Prior to CHRIS, leave management was unstable, particularly in the area of Long Service Leave. As an example, two employees on identical rates of accrual were regularly allocated disparate entitlements.

Other areas where CHRIS offered a decided advantage was in the setting up of a superannuation fund. Previously, this took 2-3 hours. Under CHRIS it takes 10 minutes.

In a professionally managed business such as HSA, management reporting plays a key role. CHRIS is a comprehensive, integrated software solution based on entering data once and allowing constant enquiries into its unlimited on-line history. User ad hoc queries, customisation tools and seamless integration with Microsoft products provide the ultimate in flexibility and functionality.

HSA staff and management are now able to report on any aspect of Payroll/ HR history. One example is cited by Roy Bailey, "Management requested certain information, which required us to run three reports out of CHRIS. The identical information, if required under the previous product, would have required the production of **150** reports.

Previously, just to set up a report to calculate the number of FTE's cost \$10,000 in customisation. Any trained CHRIS user could extract this information in minutes – without the need to involve programmers.

Perhaps the service level offered by Frontier Software, through both the implementation team and the Helpdesk, is the aspect most appreciated by HSA staff. Roy Bailey comments, "Whenever we have had a query, Frontier people have been generous in their willingness and ability to provide answers and being locally based they are able to advise on local Payroll/HR issues.

Looking to the future, HSA intends to extend access to CHRIS to regional centres. This will allow regions to capture Training information and to run Training reports. Additional HR modules, including Occupational Health and Safety and possibly Salary Packaging, will come on line progressively.

The final word belongs to Roy Bailey who in summing up said, "CHRIS is more stable, more reliable and more user friendly than the previous product. We were always able to pay people but to me, the value of a system is in the information you can get out of it. Management reporting under CHRIS is the primary benefit of the system – no doubt about it. And we were able to achieve significant cost savings into the bargain."