Three simple principles and an all-in attitude have transformed the way our Emergency Department is designing for the future.

“When we sat down to plan the new facilities, we realised we didn’t have a clear, shared vision,” said Dr Matt Vukasovic, head of emergency medicine at Westmead. “We decided to take a step back, reassess and bring our staff into the process. We organised a facilitated forum with more than 50 people including our nurses, doctors, allied health and support staff.

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“We've done large forums before but they've mainly been reactive. This was more a strategic, proactive approach as a group to define where we want to go over the next five years,” Matt said.

“Senior people have a voice. The purpose was to give everyone else an opportunity to give us their opinion regardless of whether we felt it was complimentary or not, but as it turned out it was a very productive meeting and we all ended up with a shared vision and an agreed set of goals and objectives,” Matt said.

Staff specialist Dr Amith Shetty said broader engagement and staff ownership were critical.

“Rather than moving into a new building, we want to move into a new department based on how we want to work,” Amith said. “There were three key things - engaging with staff, taking a blue sky approach rather than a solutions focus and developing a plan on a page that everyone could comment on and really own.

“Now when we plan, we have a vision we can test everything against. Is it welcoming? Is it a sustainable, positive workplace? Does it promote a research and learning culture? Does it offer compassionate care?” Amith said.

The project was led by the ED team including Matt and Amith with clinical nurse consultant Margaret Murphy, nurse manager Donna Robertson and clerical manager Jenny Hart. The team feels strongly that the process could benefit other departments too.

“With large departments and many consultants, everyone has their own ideas and it can block the department evolving and embracing more modern types of care,” Matt said. “When you have a five-year plan, it can’t be more of the same.

“Suddenly, you see that you could be the exemplar department and that’s exactly what we want.”