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Newsletter of the Illawarra Division of General Practice
- February 2009

A colleague passes

Dr Vadanam Sundar, colleague and friend to many GPs, passed away on 10th January, having just greeted his son back from overseas. At the funeral, his sister described him as the foundation of their family. Our sympathies go out to his wife, Sumathi, in particular. Sumathi trained in the Illawarra, joining her husband in running a well-managed, highly respected and locally valued general practice.

Area of need applications

The Division commonly receives requests to support practices in their application for Area of Need status; in fact there were 31 requests for assistance in the 6 months to 31 December. Of those Illawarra practices applying, approximately 36% are successful. Apart from those who make a fuss, it is difficult for us to predict those practices which are ultimately successful against those who aren't.

Medical report fees

Requests are also made of us for

information relating to appropriate charges for medical reports. For information, NSW Health charges between \$260 and \$670 for providing medical reports. Charge in relationship to copying of medical records is \$30 and \$0.35 for pages in excess of 80 (NSW Health document number IB2008_041).

headspace turnover

To the end of 2008, over 600 adolescent patients had attended the **headspace** practice. The current premises have now reached clinician saturation and the Division will be looking for alternative accommodation options over the next few months.

The turnover is not surprising given that 93 GPs have referred patients to either **headspace** and/or the Clinical Psychology Service –an extraordinary example of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Simply more complex

While the number of GPs in Australia has grown by 1,857 between 2000 and 2007 (0.9%), the number of practices has declined by 11% (948)

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from 8309 (2001) to 7361 (2007) and the number of practice nurses more than doubled from 3255 in 2004 to 7493 in 2007 (130% increase). These figures reflect the increasing complexity of general practice infrastructure.

So its interesting to note that

The number of places for GP Registrars entering general practice training has been increased from 600 to 812 annually while the number of medical students working in general practice will be boosted this year by Phase 3 placements from the Graduate School of Medicine. Spotting the GP might be something like a mild form of Where's Wally.

So its not surprising that

The number of support services provided to practices in the 6 months to December increased by 46% (to 287) compared to the same period last year.

New practices welcomed

The Division has welcomed to the area Dr George Albert and his GP colleagues from Dubbo. Now members of the Division, the new College Street practice known as the Shellharbour Medical Centre, will be officially opened this month. Meanwhile, up the road, The Shellharbour City General Practice has opened and is staffed by Drs Selvarajah, Simon Marlton and Muhamed Raza. Simon has moved from the People's Medical Centre which closed its doors as 2008 closed its.

*IT infrastructure for both practices has been provided by **OTLiS (phone 4220 7699)***

New members

Following the decision of members at the AGM, membership forms have been sent to all practices inviting nomination as practice members. In part, this means that discounted Division services can be provided to any practice without regard to membership of individual GPs in a specific practice.

New directors

Dr Stephen Lyon was elected to the Board at the AGM. To fill an existing vacancy the Board has also appointed Ms Kath McCormack as Director. Kath, as the CEO of Centacare, brings welcome experience managing a large regional NGO.

New move for old director

Most members would be aware that IDGP Board Director Mark Grimson has resigned from the Illawarra Business Chamber to take up a position as CEO with a local financial planning firm, one of the most successful in NSW. We wish Mark well in his new role coming as it does hard on troubled times.

New people

CPD Organiser Alison Burling gave birth to a new person just before Christmas. For maternal type people it looks just like any other new person of its gender type.

New initiative from Area

The Area Health Service is to introduce State Health's new eMR (electronic medical record which is unrelated to the electronic health record) starting in Wollongong Hospital. This will mean that GPs will receive a "Discharge referral". We are still working out what that is and whether this is a threat to

Docmail or not. We are working with Area to see that the "referral" arrives in a format that will allow it to be downloaded directly into the patient record.

New ways of doing business

Early results from the 5 practices involved in the Collaboratives program are somewhat startling. The number of patients unable to see a GP on a specific day has been almost halved while there has been a 66% increase in the number CHD patients with BP in the target range. The result for diabetics has been an improvement to target range in 35% of patients. 10% more patients with CHD are taking aspirin and, not surprisingly, waiting room surveys have revealed a 9% increase in patient satisfaction. Brilliant.

New way to prevent diabetes

Reset Your Life is a nationally accredited lifestyle modification program (LMP) for Type2 diabetes prevention in patients aged 40-49 years at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. (High risk is determined using the AUDRISK tool). The Division is delivering this program free to suitable participants in 7 sessions over 6 months. The program covers diet, physical activity, goal settings, motivation and stress management.

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For more information or to refer patients, contact our EP, Lauren Hickson, on 42207600 or e-mail lhickson@idgp.org.au.

New website

University of Wollongong software developer e-motion has been contracted to redesign and implement a new Divisional website. The site has four areas of specific interest, viz., general practice, allied health, patients, and GPRs and medial students. GP members can trial the site at www.idgp.org.au:8081. The site will be launched within the next few weeks.

Dinosaur delineates dental descriptor

Old Man Jim Turner has identified a smile as a marker of contentment in the toothless and homeless men he sees through the Wesley Mission in Wollongong. Working 3 hours a fortnight and using bulk billing dentists to help these people, he says the smile and progress they make following a fresh set of teeth is amazing.

Jim, who describes his work with the homeless as very rewarding, is having a mid life energy crisis and would love another GP to consider supporting this work. Jim can be contacted through the Division, directly at his practice (42294533) or wandering around near the Wesley Church with a bunch of grinning and grateful patients of no fixed abode.

Clinical Psychology Service

At December 2008, 8 Clinical Psychologists, 2 Psychologist and an Intern Clinical Psychologist were providing clinical services at the CPS and/or headspace Illawarra. The two Psychologists are in the process of completing research projects to complete their higher clinical degree. The service is still a joint service with Lifeline Southcoast which also supplies psychology services through the CPS.

Total occasions of services by psychologists for the CPS for the 6 months to December was 510 and for headspace Illawarra was 439.