

Rural health news

Issue 16
September 2007

A message from the Director

Spring is upon us, the weather is slowly starting to get warmer, school holidays aren't too far away and, with the Spring Racing Carnival around the corner, things are starting to feel brighter. Since our last edition, a number of events have taken place.

As you would all be aware, we have a new Minister for Health, the Hon. Daniel Andrews MP. Minister Andrews has taken over from the Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP, who has moved on to education. Minister Andrews comes from Gaming and Consumer Affairs and, prior to his appointment to the Ministry, was Parliamentary Secretary for the Health Portfolio.

You should also be aware that I will be leaving my current position as Director, Rural and Regional Health Services Branch (RRHSB) to take up the position of Director of Programs in Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division. I will be on leave from 28 September, and will commence my new role on my return in the first week of November.

The position of Director, RRHSB will be advertised shortly so that a permanent appointment can be made.

I'd like to thank you all for your assistance during my time in rural and regional health. I wish you all the best in future, and look forward to working with many of you in my new capacity.

Geoff Lavender
Director
Rural and Regional Health Services Branch

RURAL AND REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES BRANCH (RRHSB) NEWS

New Faces in RRHSB

- o **Jo Halls**

Jo is the newly appointed Manager of the Policy Projects Unit, in RRHSB. Jo is featured in this edition's 'spotlight'.

- o **Maria Mihelis**

Maria started working as an Executive Assistant to Geoff Lavender on 23 July in a job share role with Julie La Gamba. Her working days are Tuesday and Wednesday. Previously, Maria has worked in various administrative / executive assistant roles within DHS and other Government departments.

- o **Jamie Lynch**

Jamie Lynch is another new addition to RRHSB as part of the Rural Management Residency Program through the Australian College of Health Service Executives. Jamie will work within the Policy Projects Unit for 6 months on many different projects across the branch, including the amalgamation of the Albury and Wodonga Health Services. Prior to joining RRHSB, Jamie completed a 6-month placement with Central Gippsland Health Service. After leaving DHS, he will complete 2 further six-month placements with rural health service as part of the program.

The 14th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum - Aged Care

The next Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum will be held on Friday 23 November in the Hume Region with the theme of Aged Care. The venue will be announced shortly.

The 13th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum - Rural Directions

The 13th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum on "Rural Directions - The Challenge for the Future" was held in Lorne on Friday 17 August. A record 185 participants attended the forum to hear an address by the newly appointed Minister for Health, the Hon. Daniel Andrews MP. The forum, which was facilitated by Dr Norman Swan, included presentations on Collaboration by Assistant Commissioner Dr Leigh Gassner, Change and Adjustment in Rural Victoria by Dr Emily Phillips, and Expanding Horizons for Medical Research, by Alicia Eaton of Deakin Medical School.

Dr Chris Brook, Executive Director of DHS' Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services (RRHACS) Division, presented a discussion paper on *Rural directions for a better state of health 2007*, outlining the roles, relationships and development priorities for rural health services. The paper served as the basis for regional workshop discussions during the forum. Positive feedback was received on the forum (including speakers, venue, and location) describing it as "very relevant, timely and important" and the workshops "open and encouraging". The discussion paper was described as "the best document to come from RRHACS in many years."

Presentations from the forum and the discussion paper are available to download from:

<http://n036.csv.au/net/health/ruralhealth/news/forums.htm>

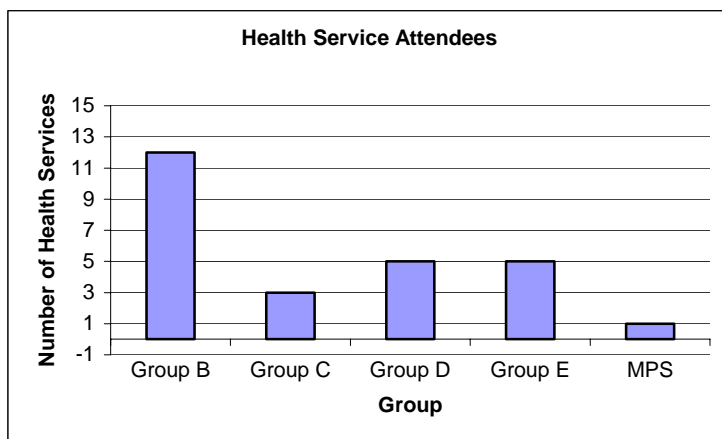
Rural Health Workforce Planning Guidelines Workshops

Five regional workshops, conducted during early August, were well attended with forty-seven representatives from twenty-seven health services. The workshops complement the release of the Rural Health Workforce Planning Guidelines and CD and enabled attendees to participate in interactive sessions on workforce planning.

Attendees included Directors of Nursing, CEOs, Directors of Medical Services, Human Resource managers, Region of Choice Coordinators and departmental staff.

Participants benefited from sharing common issues, developing strategies and the use of tools to analyse their workforce gaps. There was also strong agreement that the workshops would assist agencies to introduce or improve workforce planning within their own agency.

The guidelines are available at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth> or by contacting Sue Leyland, Senior Project Officer, Rural and Regional Health Services Branch on 90960433, or email Susan.Leyland@dhs.vic.gov.au



Albury/Wodonga Health Service Progress

The integration of health services for Albury and Wodonga was the subject of a recent Albury Australian Medical Association (AMA) forum auspiced jointly by the Victorian and New South Wales (NSW) branches.

The forum was an opportunity to provide an update on progress, recognise the frustration of local stakeholders, and allay concerns that the lack of visible activity indicated a lack of ongoing commitment by the two Governments.

As outlined by DHS' Executive Director RRHACS, Dr Chris Brook, the task can be likened more to dealing with a merger of two jurisdictions than two health services and consequently is a whole of government matter for both Victoria and New South Wales. There is still much to be done to address differences in governance structures, funding arrangements, legal frameworks, organisational arrangements and accountabilities, industrial relations and culture.

The reasons for continuing – increased range of services for the Albury Wodonga community

over time, opportunity for comprehensive service planning approach for all residents and improved workforce recruitment and retention for health professionals amongst others – remain compelling.

A joint NSW-Victorian Inter Departmental Committee is developing in principle proposals, which are subject to formal Cabinet consideration by both governments, but can be expected to be similar to:

- commitment to a single population-health focussed entity across all health services
- start with hospital services; later inclusions of mental health and community health
- new entity to be a Victorian Public Health Service with Board membership to include nominees from both jurisdictions
- Albury Base Hospital and the Albury (spell out) SLA to be excised from Greater Southern Area Health Services responsibility
- Albury services contracted to Victoria via a Victorian/NSW intergovernmental agreement; Victoria to contract with the new health service for services for both Wodonga and Albury residents.

There are a number of challenges for Victoria to address in the coming months and the proposal outlined above will only be acceptable when a proper risk assessment has been undertaken and satisfactory responses has been developed for identified risks.

While the aim is to establish a single health entity, the two hospitals and other local stakeholders continue to actively explore avenues for collaboration within the existing governance arrangements.

OTHER NEWS

Charter Training for Rural & Regional Public Hospitals

A number of training sessions have been developed by DHS for key public hospital staff, tailored specifically to help them to understand the most relevant aspects of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities,

to conduct risk-management assessments of policies and practices, and to deal with patient concerns and complaints.

Three sessions for rural and regional public hospitals will be held in regional centers in October/November. A light lunch provided from 12 noon at all sessions.

Traralgon

Date: Thursday 18 October
Time: 12.30 - 3.30

Bendigo

Date: Thursday 25 October
Time: 12.30 - 3.30

Colac

Date: Thursday 1 November
Time: 12.30 - 3.30

In addition, two sessions for Metro hospitals will be held at DHS Head Office in Melbourne in September. Rural are more than welcome to attend.

Date: Friday 14 September
Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm
Venue: DHS Head Office

Date: Friday 14 September
Time: 1.30pm to 4.30pm
Venue: DHS Head Office

RSVPs to all sessions are essential.

Please respond to anne.mullins@dhs.vic.gov.au & cc. to dianne.scott@dhs.vic.gov.au. (NOTE: The cc is essential)

If you have any questions about the sessions, please contact Anne Mullins on 9096 8421 on Thursdays and Fridays, or telephone Dianne Scott on 9096 7198 Mon-Wed.

Remote Area Nurses

Forty-six Remote Area Nurses (RANs) employed by Bush Nursing Centres have successfully completed the 2007 Emergency Care Update Program and have been deemed competent in the application of the 2007 Remote Area Nurse Emergency Guidelines. The training enables RANs to respond to emergency incidents where they are unable to access a medical practitioner. The training is provided by Rural Ambulance Victoria (RAV) and has been endorsed by the Royal College of

Nursing and allocated 25 Continuing Nursing Education Points.

Regional offices have purchased State Mobile Radios for RANs to enable joint dispatch to occur when RAV receives a 000 call in an area covered by a RAN.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program began in Victoria in January this year. Across Victoria, all people turning 55 or 65 between 1 May 2006 and 30 June 2008 will be invited to take part in screening for bowel cancer.

Screening for bowel cancer is simple. Those eligible for the National Program will receive a faecal occult blood test (FOBT) in the mail, within a couple of months of their 55th or 65th birthday. The FOBT is carried out at home and requires taking a tiny sample from two, separate bowel motions, and sending the completed test to a designated pathology service for analysis. A positive FOBT will reveal tiny amounts of blood in the bowel motion that may be invisible to the naked eye but could be a sign of bowel cancer. Those returning a positive FOBT result will be urged to see their doctor for further assessment and referral for colonoscopy if appropriate.

The National Program will become one of the largest-scale health programs Australia has seen in the last 10 years, with the potential of saving over 1000 lives from bowel cancer each year. It is therefore important that community health professionals understand how the program works in order to promote participation and answer questions from clients.

For clients not yet eligible for the National Program, FOBTs are available to purchase through GPs, some pharmacies or by calling The Cancer Council Victoria Cancer Helpline on 13 11 20

With over 230,000 Victorians receiving an invitation in this phase of the National Program, it is essential health professionals understand the program and are able to support clients to participate.

Further information regarding the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program can be obtained from www.cancerscreening.gov.au or by calling 1800 118 868. You can also access information about the National Program and

bowel cancer at The Cancer Council Victoria www.cancervic.org.au or by calling the Cancer Helpline on 13 11 20



MANAGING CANCER IN RURAL AUSTRALIA: A NATIONAL E-LEARNING PROGRAM FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS IN RURAL AREAS OF AUSTRALIA

Australia's peak body for Medical Oncology, the Medical Oncology Group of Australia (MOGA), is pleased to announce a new program called **ENHANCING PALLIATION IN PATIENTS WITH ADVANCED CANCER IN RURAL AREAS OF AUSTRALIA** is now available to all medical and health practitioners in all areas of Australia.

Targeting rural and remote general practitioners and health care workers, the program features web-based learning strategies, including individual and peer-to-peer modules. The six-hour e-learning program makes current materials and information regarding palliative treatment modalities, making decisions about palliative cancer treatments and multidisciplinary care accessible to rural and remote health practitioners who otherwise would not have such training opportunities.

The program was developed by Australia's leading health consultants, many of whom are featured in the voice over PowerPoint presentations within the program. The program also includes four case studies covering lung cancer, breast cancer, colorectal and prostate cancer. Printable workbooks are available and online facilitators are designed to assist participants.

This program is a component of the Federal Government's Rural Health, Support, Education and Training (RHSET) Program and has been generously funded by the Department of Health and Ageing with additional funding from Hospira Pty Ltd.

Associate Professor Bogda Koczwara, MOGA Chairman, who led the project management team states, "MOGA has a strong commitment to strengthen and build upon our relationship with our rural colleagues by sharing our skills

as well as expertise. Our Association is acutely aware of the demands that are placed on our colleagues in outlying and remote areas of Australia and the limited infrastructure available to them in working with patients with cancer. In addition, many of our metropolitan and regional based members provide extensive outreach and support services to our rural colleagues. MOGA has taken advantage of the complementary strengths and knowledge of many of our colleagues and members to create this national rural education program that is unparalleled in terms of its flexibility, teaching excellence, scope and resources."

Access to the program is available online to general practitioners and health care providers at no cost. To register and view the program visit: www.primed.com.au/mogacancerpal.

For more information please contact Kevin Comlossy, 02 8247 6210, moga@moga.org.au or visit our website: www.moga.org.au

Exciting Opportunities in Rural Health for Young Graduates

The highly successful Rural Management Residency Program is designed for young graduates looking to pursue a career in management within the rural health sector. A high percentage of people who have completed the program now hold jobs in high management positions in rural health services. The program, which is organised and run by Australian College of Health Service Executives, is an initiative developed to address the issue of the shortage of healthcare management personnel in rural Victoria. Applicants can apply to participate in one of the following two streams:

Rural Management Residency Program (For recent graduates)

- Includes four six-month placements in rural and regional health services
- Includes fully funded study program leading to a Graduate Diploma in Business (Management) from Monash University
- Salary Package totaling approx: \$45,000 per annum

Rural Post-Graduate Management Residency Program

- Designed to prepare young professionals with prior work experience for senior management positions in rural and regional health services
- Includes placements with close mentoring by senior executives in rural and regional health services
- Salary Package totaling approx: \$55,000 per annum

If you have a strong desire to work in a management role in the healthcare sector, the program offers you the chance to work in various public sector health services that are committed to developing future managers. Applications will be considered from graduates of any degree program including business or health-related disciplines.

If you or someone you know, are interested in applying to become a Rural Management Resident, please visit www.achse.org.au and click on VIC Tab or phone (03) 8843 2224.

Applications for 2008 intake open mid September 2007

Climate Change and Human Health Conference 2007

The Climate Change and Human Health Conference 2007 will be held at the Park Hyatt, Melbourne on Tuesday 16th and Wednesday 17th October 2007.

The Conference themes are:

- Human health and social impacts of climate changes
- Reducing morbidity and mortality from the impacts of climate change
- Planning for increased numbers of heat waves
- Mental Health
- Aged Care
- Infant and child wellbeing
- Managing people with existing illnesses or conditions
- Emergency management
- Water
- Communicable diseases
- Drought

More information about the conference, including how to register, can be found at <http://www.healthclimate2007.com/>

Spotlight on: Jo Halls

Jo Halls has been appointed as Manager, Policy Projects in DHS' Rural and Regional Health Services Branch.

In this role, Jo will manage a team responsible for providing policy advice on rural and regional health issues, advising on Commonwealth-State relations, managing health service governance issues, Ministerial Rural Health Forums and state-wide Rural Health Conferences, and coordinating Branch contributions to departmental and government policy and administrative requirements.

Jo comes from the Office of Housing, where she was the Manager, Strategic Budgets and Planning. Jo has previously worked in DHS' Public Health Branch, the former Department of Natural Resources & Environment and the Department of Justice.

Jo also has a secret life as an elite athlete. She is the current Australian women's foil champion, a Sydney 2000 Olympian, and is currently trying to qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. As part of the qualification process, Jo will compete in the World Fencing Championships to be held in St Petersburg in October this year.

"I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues in Government and with the sector to help ensure our health system provides a quality service for rural Victorians", she said.

Please send your feedback and suggestions for future editions of Rural health news to:

Mary Lenihan by email:
mary.lenihan@dhs.vic.gov.au
Or by telephone: (03) 90961468