

GP Community Briefs

Keeping you up to date with the activities of the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice

December 2002

Evans steams ahead!

A new community group in Evans Head is working hard to establish a community bus, community garden and walking groups. It is part of a 12-month pilot project to come up with sustainable solutions to some of the area's health needs.

The division is coordinating the project, which is funded by the Commonwealth government. It is one of 10 pilot projects nationwide, and aims to put in place strategies that will continue within the community after the project is completed.

In a survey before the project started, the community identified alcohol misuse, smoking, heart disease, hypertension (high blood pressure), aged care and transport issues to be of concern.

Two community forums were held in October, and ideas to help address some of these issues included organising fun exercise activities, increasing locals' knowledge of existing health services, and getting involved in community radio to promote health issues. From these meetings a local community group was formed.

The community group will look at ways to increase the community's awareness of the risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease and to highlight the importance of regular medical check-ups.

The town's three GPs, Drs Paul Walsh, Paul Watterston and Rohini Ariyasinghe say they are delighted to be involved in the project and are excited about helping the community to address the health issues it has identified. Paul Watterston and Paul Walsh, who have a particular interest in exercise, will be encouraging the community to be more active. Both say they would like to see more people walking

on a regular basis. The practice is also looking forward to working more closely with other health services to improve the coordination of care.

A project launch and screening day is planned for February 22 (market day). There will be information on heart disease and people will have the opportunity to have their risk factors for heart disease assessed. There will also be an expo on healthy lifestyles such as healthy eating and various exercise options. Everybody is welcome, not just locals.

The local Evans Head GPs will take an active part in the day and it will be a chance to meet them if you have not already done so. People will also be able to join local physical activity groups and clubs.

It's also full steam ahead for the new community noticeboard, which council will be placing near the pedestrian crossing for all to use. It will have information on services, physical activity options, courses and all project activities.

Some of the other projects the community group are working on are projects within the school, transport issues, exercise options, smoking and alcohol issues, community garden and a Healthy Nutritional Options course to be run through TAFE Outreach.

People who would like more information, would like to be involved in the project, or would simply like to share some ideas, can contact project officer Ellie Saberi on 6622 4453. Community development training is offered to all volunteers.

In the meantime, don't forget to read your local paper and check the community noticeboard for the latest news on the project. See you out and about in Evans Head!

\$550 bowled into cancer fund



Ivan Eichorn of the Northern Rivers Prostrate Support Group bowls to launch Bowl Cancer Over in November, watched by Sara Hurren, Priority Health Care Program cancer coordinator, Lyndie Dennehy, development officer, Southern Cross Credit Union, and Doug MacLaren-Smith, a member of Supporting Our Cancer Communities.

The first two Bowl Cancer Over events held in the Kyogle and Brunswick Heads bowling clubs in November raised more than \$500 for local cancer support groups. The bowling clubs are part of a fundraising initiative that hopes to raise about \$30,000 for local cancer support groups.

"We are thrilled with this response and we hope that all 36 bowling clubs in the region will come on board," Sara Hurren, cancer coordinator for the regional Priority Health Care Program, said.

"The money raised will be divided equally between the cancer support groups in the region and will be used for educating cancer patients and their families, training volunteers, and promoting the groups."

The fundraising drive is an initiative of the Priority Health Care cancer team, which is based at the division's offices, and the area's local cancer communities, which are part of the umbrella group, Supporting Our Cancer Communities.

The next Bowl Cancer Over days will take place in South Lismore, Woodburn, Casino and Alstonville bowling clubs early next year. To nominate your club, contact Sara Hurren on 6622 4453.



*A merry and peaceful Christmas
and a Happy New Year
to you and your family!*

Chicken pox vaccine recommended

Chicken pox is most common during the summer months and local GPs have already treated several patients who have the disease.

A vaccine that protects children against chicken pox is now available and the division's immunisation project suggests parents consider the vaccine for their children.

"Usually chicken pox is a mild illness, but complications can include brain inflammation and serious pneumonias," Dr Sue Page, who manages the immunisation project, said.

"Adults tend to feel much sicker than children, and people who have poor immune systems are at particular risk. The spots are itchy, and young children often scratch so much they get scars. Even without scratching, spots on the face can leave the familiar pock-mark scars."

Chicken pox is recognisable by the itchy rash of small red spots that first appear on the face and trunk and then spread to the rest of the body. The spots become blisters, which then crust over. The virus is spread by coughing or sneezing or contact with fluid from a chicken pox sore. It is infectious for about two days before the rash appears and until the final blister crusts over, about six days later. The sick person will also have a fever lasting from three to five days. The incubation period is between 14 - 15 days.

"Others who might consid-

er having the vaccine are those older than 12 years who have not had chicken-pox. Three quarters of 12 year olds have immunity but the remaining quarter need to consider the consequences of contracting chicken pox during their teenage years, particularly when their immune systems may be under stress, such as at exam time.

"For others, their job or the people they are in contact with regularly might put them or their dependants at higher risk: people such as healthcare workers, teachers, child care workers, the parents of young children, women and their partner before pregnancy, and household contacts of people with poor immune systems."

Children aged between nine months and 12 years receive one dose of the vaccine. Adolescents and adults need two doses.

The vaccine is not on the childhood immunisation schedule, although this may change in the future, according to Dr Page. It is available by prescription from GPs and costs about \$60 from the chemist. Chemists will supply foil bags for the vaccine as it must be kept within a certain temperature range. They will also supply eskies if required.

"It is best to pick up vaccines immediately before visiting the GP. Some pharmacies regularly deliver to local surgeries so ask your chemist if they can deliver it for you," Dr Page advises.

For more information about the NRDGP and its health projects, visit our website: www.nrdgp.org.au

In brief

Community liaison committee seeks new members

Would you like to be a part of the division's community liaison committee? There are some vacancies on the committee for people who have an interest in their community and would like to share and develop ideas about health issues in the community. The committee meets quarterly. Please contact project officer Louise Young on 6622 4453 for more information.

Post natal outreach clinics start in Iluka and Evans Head

The Northern Rivers Family Care Centre (post natal day stay unit) has started outreach clinics in Iluka and Evans Head for women experiencing post-natal difficulties.

The monthly outreach clinics are for the first 12 months after the birth of a baby. Two Tresillian nurses and a social worker are available to assist parents with issues such as adjustment to parenthood, parentcraft difficulties and postnatal distress. The NR Family Care Centre will establish additional outreach clinics in Casino and Ballina

early next year. For a referral to the clinic please see your GP or early childhood nurse.

Need help managing your medications?

Do you always remember to take your medications? Have you spent time in hospital recently?

Home Medicines Review is a service doctors and pharmacists offer to patients living at home who may have difficulty managing their medications.

A home medicines review will help you use your medicines more effectively and avoid unwanted side effects. Talk to your GP or pharmacist if you think you might benefit from a home medicines review. For more information contact Christine Havill at the division on 66 22 4453.

More to get meningococcal C vaccine

Next year, all children aged over 12 months to five years will be eligible for a free vaccine against meningococcal C from their GP. The new vaccine program will also see 15 to 19 year-olds vaccinated at school. Children aged six to 14 years will be vaccinated at school during 2003-05.



Bowl cancer over!

Running from November-March, Bowl Cancer Over involves all lawn bowls clubs in the region to help local cancer support groups & cancer community services.

NEXT CONFIRMED Bowl Cancer Over EVENTS:

South Lismore Bowling Club (Early March)

Woodburn Bowling Club (Sunday 30 March)

All welcome!

Others planned in Casino & Alstonville.

Need more info? Lismore: Sara Hurren 6622 4453

Alstonville: Ivan Eichorn 6628 3193

Casino: Sue Smallcombe on 666 25423

Coordinators: SOCC (Supporting Our Cancer Communities)