

GP Community Briefs

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

June 2003

General practice reprieve for Nimbin

The future of general practice services in Nimbin looks more secure with the announcement of \$194,000 in State government funding to the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice to help establish GP services in a number of small community centres in the district.

Nimbin GP Dan Oxlee closed his practice at the end of May citing the permanent on-call and the burdens and expense of running a solo general practice where there were once three doctors as his main reasons.

"Many GPs are discouraged from providing services in small towns because of the management and administrative burden of setting up practice. We are hopeful that with this assistance getting started, Nimbin will have a surgery opened again within three months." Dr Sue Page, GP executive manager of the division, said.

In the interim, the division's locum, Dr Arik Bronstein, will provide locum relief at Nimbin's hospital, ensuring medical cover in conjunction with Dr Dan Oxlee until December.

Funded under the State Government's GP entity scheme, the project aims to help

rural and remote disadvantaged communities by establishing multi-purpose outposts that incorporate the ability to provide a general practice service.

The first multi-purpose outpost in the region opened in Wardell last week under the auspices of Ballina Shire Council. Dr Page says the new funding will allow the division to assist GPs establish a medical service there within about a month.

The multi-purpose outposts will enable communities to broker services such as Centrelink, employment agencies or health services, depending on community needs. Both Wardell and Nimbin were identified as communities that would benefit from the establishment of a health outpost incorporating general practice and allied health services.

The GP entity project is a result of a collaborative partnership between the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice, Northern Rivers Area Health Service, Ballina and Lismore councils and local communities. It is planned that the project will be expanded to include other small rural centres in the region experiencing difficulties attracting GPs.

GP youth voucher to be launched in July

A young Byron Bay artist was the winner of the division's logo design competition for its new youth voucher.

Brendan Keevers (19), was recently presented with a \$200 gift voucher at the launch of the pilot youth voucher scheme.

"We were delighted at the response to the competition and particularly liked Brendan's entry, which appeals to our target market of teenagers and young adults," said Rob Trigger, GP manager of the youth health project.

The design is being used on a voucher the division has developed for young people in the area to make it easier for them to see their GP.

The youth voucher pilot scheme will be run in collaboration with the region's youth health workers. In June about 13 GPs and a number of youth workers will be trained in how the scheme will operate and the pilot will get underway in July in Lismore, Ballina, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby.

These are the areas where the division's research has suggested a higher level of unmet health needs for some young people.

"We hope use of the voucher will help those young people who do not see a GP because of cost or other reasons," Dr Trigger said.

The winner and the shortlist of entries can be viewed on www.nrdgp.org.au

Northern Star photographer Gabrielle Thompson getting the perfect shot of budding Byron artist Brendan Keevers with his winning logo design for the youth voucher. With him are Anita Mansfield, youth health project officer, and Dr Rob Trigger, youth health GP manager.

Spike visits Ballina and Wardell



Spike is pictured here with beautiful baby Cassandra Eady from Ballina at Ballina Fair Shopping Centre.

Spike had a great day out in Ballina Fair shopping centre in early May where he met loads of children while his friends from the division and Public Health Unit were able to talk to parents about immunisation.

Spike was also invited to the opening of the new community access centre in Wardell in May. If you would like to invite Spike to your community event, please contact Marianne Trent at the Public Health Unit on 6620 7514 to discuss.

Please visit the website "Vax 'em" on www.vaccination.org.au



NR Family Care Centre celebrates one year

The Watts family is just one of more than 300 families in the Northern Rivers to have benefited from the services of the Northern Rivers Family Care Centre, which has just celebrated its first birthday.

Young mum Katie Watts has nothing but praise for the Family Care Centre. She was referred to the day stay unit when she was having problems establishing breastfeeding with her newborn Kiara and was about to give up trying.

"Coming here sorted out all the problems and I can still breastfeed. The staff were incredibly helpful," she said.

"In our mothers' group, they all know about the service. A lot of mothers have been referred here and they all speak very highly of it."

The day stay centre assists parents of babies up to one year old with issues such as adjustment to parenthood, parentcraft difficulties such as attachment, breastfeeding and settling, and postnatal distress. Monthly outreach clinics are held in Iluka, Evans Head, Casino and Ballina.

Dr Paul Earner, GP project advisor at the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice, spoke highly of the service at the birthday party, which was attended by parents who have used the service, local health workers and volunteers.

"In one short year it has become an integral part of the regional health service," Dr Earner said.

"Before it opened, women experiencing post-natal difficulties faced the choice to suffer alone, be readmitted to hospital, or travel to Sydney or Brisbane for treatment in a residential facility. Now, women are referred to the day stay unit before there is any question of referral to a residential facility."

During the birthday party, the chairman of St Vincent's Hospital Dr Bill Buddee presented a cheque for \$400 to the Family Care Centre. The money was raised at a charity night held earlier this year. Dr Earner also thanked the generosity of the community, which has donated more than \$30,000 in



Imogen Barnes (2.5 years), Dr Paul Earner, GP project advisor, Katie Watts with 7 month old Kiara, and Dr Bill Buddee, chair of St Vincent's Hospital, help celebrate the Family Care Centre's first birthday.

goods and money in the last 16 months, and the ongoing support of Zonta and Quota.

The centre employs three nurses and three social workers. Located in the grounds of St Vincent's Hospital, it is funded until June 2004 through the More Allied Health Services (MAHS) funds, administered by the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice.

For a referral to the clinic please see your doctor or child and family health nurse.

The Northern Rivers Family Care Centre is a project of the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice and is supported by St Vincent's Hospital and the Northern Rivers Area Health Service.

Forgotten vaccines?

The need for vaccinations doesn't stop when your child reaches seven years of ages. Here is a brief outline of recommended vaccines.

Hepatitis B vaccination for 10 year olds
This vaccination will be available for 10 year olds until 2010, when those who have been vaccinated with it as babies will reach 10 years old. The vaccination is free.

Tetanus for 15 year olds
This is a booster dose. Provided this vaccination is your child's fifth dose of tetanus vaccine, they will not need another until they are 50 years old unless they get a tetanus prone wound. By this age the whopping cough immunisation given at 5 years will have worn off so it is worth considering Boosterix as it contains tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough vaccine (both naturally acquired and vaccinated immunity to whooping cough reduces dramatically after 10 years).

Tetanus for 50 year olds
Once the primary course of tetanus has been given followed by two booster doses at 5 and 15 years, a tetanus vaccination should be given at 50 years. The reported cases of tetanus have generally been in the over 50s. Consider asking for Boosterix as it also contains a whooping cough vaccine although it does attract a cost.

MMR vax for the people born after 1968
Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccination is offered to 18 to 30 year-olds because they were too old to be included in the MMR vaccination campaigns of 1994 and 1998, and because they did not have the level of immunity of older people who had been exposed to the wild measles virus before the introduction of measles vaccine in 1968. These are now 21 to 33 year-olds.

Adolescents/young adults who have had only one dose of MMR vaccine need a second dose. This vaccine is free.



NEW LUNG SUPPORT GROUP

The newly formed Richmond River Lung Support Group has met twice to date. This informal group provides support and information to people who have or care for anybody with a chronic lung condition. All are welcome. The next meeting will be in July. For more information please contact Jason Hurren on 6686 8997.

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