

## Patients see value of 'The Red Book'

John Stretch of Ballina is just one of many patients who have seen the benefits of the Red Book and he has adopted it enthusiastically.

The Red Book (or *My Health Record*) has been designed especially for patients with chronic and complex health problems such as respiratory disease, cancer and cardiovascular disease. It allows them to keep all their medical information in one place.

It makes it easier for their various health carers to see at a glance the patient's medications and treatments.

Mr Stretch speaks highly of the Red Book. He himself has had major heart surgery and takes a keen interest in his personal health record. He thinks it is important for people to be able to take their medical information with them when they see their GPs or specialist.

"It's been very well thought out," Mr Stretch says.

"People should think of it as their health bible. It guides people to take an interest in themselves. It can give comfort and act as a reminder. By placing it under the phone, everyone knows where it is, from the family members to the ambos."

Since the *My Health Record* was introduced to the Northern Rivers earlier this year, an increasing number of people with chronic and complex

health conditions have requested their own copy.

Similar to the infant's Blue Book, *My Health Record* is a special folder that holds information for



*John Stretch from Ballina is enthusiastic about the Red Book, which holds only the personal health information he wants.*

adult patients and is designed for people in NSW who need to access a number of medical services regularly. It allows patients to keep track more easily of the variety of medical services they use.

Part of the area's Priority Health Care Program

(PHCP), the liaison workers have been mainly responsible for distributing the Red Book in this area.

Suzanne Hutton, cancer liaison worker with the PHCP, says the book is especially useful because all the information can be kept in one place in an easy to carry size. "Patients don't have to try to find lots of separate bits of paper with information on them, such as medication lists. It has an easy to see appointment schedule and patients can put in as much or as little information as they wish."

The Red Book has been designed to help GPs and other health care providers make better decisions about a patient's health care. It belongs to the patient and its use is voluntary. If you would like a Red Book, phone us here at the division of general practice on 6622 4453.

## Think active. Think lifeball.

Lifeball is progressing in leaps and bounds on the Northern Rivers. Since the first Lismore tryout workshop in February this year, there has been great interest from individuals and community organisations in getting lifeball established.

Groups in Ballina and Maclean are now playing regularly, a Lismore group is about to start, and the Evans Head and Casino communities

are working to set up a group in their towns.

"It's just been wonderful," says Beryl Wilkins, the project officer of the Ballina lifeball group. The Ballina group is auspiced by the Ballina District Community Services Association (BDCSA).

The Ballina group was formed in July and meets every Tuesday from 9.30am to 11.30am in Ballina's skating and recreation centre. People (men and women) can come to try it out – there is no obligation. In Ballina, the cost is \$15 a year and \$5 each game including morning tea.

At 82 years of age, Toni Davidson is the oldest player on the team. A friend recommended she try it and she loves it, although

she was a bit sceptical at first.

"I'm not 20 anymore, but I thought bugger it, I'd give it a go!" she says.

The players in Ballina are aged in their 50s and up. The group is



friendly and enthusiastic and reckon lifeball is fun, social, good exercise and retains a competitive edge.

Lifeball is a safe team game designed so anyone can play and is especially suited to older people - both men and women. The game is a similar to a modified form of netball and basketball and incorporates activities such as walking, passing and throwing to encourage physical movement and teamwork. It is a thinking game designed for skill, fun and fitness and can be played on any flat surface.

In addition to the team spirit and social interaction, lifeball also has many physical benefits. It improves balance, coordination, strength, flexibility, mobility, and fitness. It gets the circulation going and relieves stiffness.

For more information, phone the Northern Rivers Health Promotion Unit on 6620 7500, and ask for a Stay Active Stay Independent project officer.

# Changes to the immunisation schedule

The government has just approved some changes to the national immunisation schedule. There will now be two immunisation paths: The Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule (ASVS) and the free National Immunisation Program (NIP).

The Australian Government funds vaccines for the immunisation of Australians through the National Immunisation Program. The National Immunisation Program provides free vaccines for both children and adults.

The ASVS lists all technical recommendations for vaccination made on the basis of disease burden, vaccine effectiveness in preventing disease and cost-effectiveness of the vaccine in the Australian population. These vaccines are not provided free of charge.

Recent changes to the free schedule include a new adolescent dose of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (dTpa) vaccine and the expansion of the childhood pneu-

mococcal vaccination program.

## One less vaccine on the schedule

Changes to the schedule include the removal of the 18 month diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) meaning one less vaccination on the schedule. A booster dose is still required at four years of age.

This has been removed in line with advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) that the dose is now considered unnecessary because of the high levels of immunity from the primary course of vaccinations at 2, 4 and 6 months of age.

## New vaccines funded under the program

*Diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine*  
A new single dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine will

now be funded in place of the previous vaccine that did not contain protection against whooping cough. This new vaccine aims to reduce the significant number of teenage whooping cough cases each year. It will also protect children too young to be immunised against whooping cough who contract this disease from their older siblings and young adults.

## *Pneumococcal vaccine*

Pneumococcal vaccine will also be provided to an increased number of Australian children who are predisposed to pneumococcal infection. The program covers children:

- under five years of age with predisposing medical risk factors;
- all children under two years of age living in Central Australia;
- all Aboriginal children under five years of age living in Central Australia; and
- all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under two years of age.

# Division programs up for awards

Three Northern Rivers division programs have been shortlisted for industry awards.

The division entered four of its projects or programs into the Australian Divisions of General Practice annual achievement awards: the GP entity project in Nimbin and Wardell, the rural chronic disease Evans Head project, the NRDGP Interactive Information CDs for practices, and the division's publications. These last two have been shortlisted in the innovation and promoting divisions categories. The division's publications include publications such as *GPSpeak*, the division's three websites, newsletters *The Immune Response* and *GP Community Briefs*, and its brochures and fliers.

The division will be well represented at the ADGP conference in Brisbane in November, when the award winners will be announced.

The joint NRDGP/NRAHS Peak Respiratory Program in the Northern Rivers has also been selected as a finalist in the



| *GPSpeak*

Baxter 2003 NSW Health Awards in the access category.

An innovative component of the PEAK program developed and implemented in the Northern Rivers was the intermittent pulmonary rehabilitation programs offered to smaller hospitals in RRAMA 4-7 areas. The programs were offered with site based training for existing staff, standardised documentation, loan kits of all essential equipment

and remuneration for each program conducted. The outcomes achieved by this model were a doubling of the total number of people able to access this service, equity of access for rural and remote residents, high GP referral rates and significant workplace culture change relating to chronic respiratory disease.

The finalists from 10 categories have been invited to join the NSW Minister for Health at the Baxter Awards ceremony on October 24 in Sydney, where the winners of each category will be announced.

Congratulations to all who supported these very successful programs. Good luck!



**FAXBACK FEEDBACK:** We value your feedback. If you would like to make the division aware of any ideas for possible health projects, or if you have comments on any of our current projects, please fill out and fax this form to 6622 3185, email [media@nrdgp.org.au](mailto:media@nrdgp.org.au), or phone 6622 4453.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Ph/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_