

## Some patients may now access exercise physiologists through Medicare



Dr Andrew Binns with SCU student exercise physiologist Rhiannon Holden and her 'student', Judith Light, who were presented with a certificate of achievement at completion of their eight-week exercise program at SCU.

A successful program run for the last three years by the School of Exercise Science and Sports Medicine, Southern Cross University, clearly shows the benefits of a formal exercise program under the supervision of an exercise physiologist.

"What has been achieved through this program can now be achieved through Medicare," Goonellabah GP Dr Andrew Binns said at the breakfast held to celebrate the end of the program.

"From January, people with certain chronic conditions who visit their GP to have a Team Care Arrangement drawn up may now also be referred to an exercise physiologist."

Patients with obesity related health problems such as metabolic, mechanical, as well as motivational problems, were referred by their GPs to the SCU program where they were matched with exercise physiology students. Patients with such problems have a significant risk factor for diabetes, heart disease or stroke.

Individually tailored to the patient's needs, the eight-week program aimed to improve their quality of life, waist measurements, cholesterol and blood sugar levels where appro-

priate and reduce their weight.

Participant Alan Gerrish, referred to the SCU program by Dr Binns, said he was delighted with the program, which he has just completed for the second time.

"It actually got me motivated. Between last year and this year, I've been working hard. I have lost one stone in weight and walk at least three times a week for at least an hour."

Mr Gerrish is diabetic, asthmatic and has emphysema. He says the program has helped him to feel better. Before joining he would get

two or three chest infections each winter. This year he got just one, which was milder and did not last as long as previous infections.

Participating again this year has also helped to keep him motivated, he says, as well as doubling the improvements to his fitness levels and general health. "It's made a big difference to my health. It's a great scheme."

Patients with chronic health problems as a result of being overweight may now be eligible to see an exercise physiologist as part of their on-going health care. They are encouraged to ask their GP if

they fit the criteria for a Team Care Arrangement.

"Exercise physiologists will soon be an important part of some patients' health care team as a Team Care Arrangement includes up to five allied health visits a year funded by Medicare," Dr Binns said.

## Local GPs get help in fight against cancer

Local GPs will be working to improve cancer care and prevention in the region with a \$50,000 grant from the Cancer Institute NSW.

The Northern Rivers Division of General Practice (NRDGP) aims to improve the awareness and skills of GPs and practice nurses in helping people quit smoking.

It also aims to improve the links between GPs and the multi-disciplinary breast cancer care meetings. These are held weekly to discuss care plans for women newly diagnosed with breast cancer and include the specialists and other health care workers involved in the woman's care.

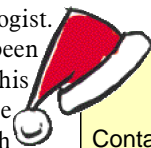
The project will complement the area's hospitals becoming smoke free and the medical team that works to deliver multidisciplinary care to breast cancer patients.

The average GP cares for about 16 cancer patients a year, four of which are serious cases, according to the Cancer Institute.

"GPs are at the front line of health care and are crucial to early diagnosis and rapid referral," Dr Dan Ewald, an executive manager at the NRDGP, said.

Cancer prevention is also a major focus of the project, which aims to help GPs provide the best advice on how to quit smoking, one of the leading causes of cancer in NSW.

"GPs are well placed to enhance prevention and the early detection of cancer amongst their patients and can play a major role in raising awareness of cancer risks. This project is an important step in improving cancer outcomes and the cancer experience for patients," Dr Ewald said.

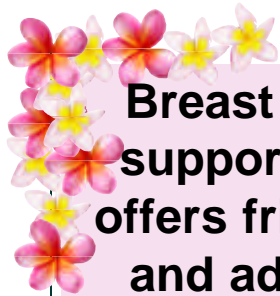


### DON'T LET CHRISTMAS GO TO WAIST

Containing our waistline over Christmas is a challenge for most of us! However with a little planning ahead we should be able to achieve stability as long as we do plenty of physical activity to make up for the extra energy consumed through eating all that delicious Christmas fare...

#### SOME HEALTH PROMOTING CHRISTMAS PRESENT IDEAS:

- Pedometer to measure the number of steps we take in a day (try to do more than 10,000 a day)
- Poles for polewalking, a new type of exercise that gives the upper body a workout at the same time as a lower body workout.
- Any sporting goods
- *French Women Don't Get Fat* by Mireille Guiliano
- *The GI Factor* by Jenny Brand Miller



## Breast cancer support group offers friendship and advice to young women

A local support group for young women with breast cancer was established in May by the division and the North Coast Area Health Service. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month.

The meetings are a chance for young women to catch up with each other.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday 1 February

**Time:** 10.00am to 12.00pm

**Location:** Lismore Community Health, Level 3, 29 Molesworth St, Lismore.

**All young women with or recovering from breast cancer are welcome to attend the meetings. To register or have your name put on the mailing list, phone Sara Hurren at the North Coast Area Health Service on 6620 2401.**

*This project was made possible with a Polo Ralph Lauren seeding grant from the National Breast Cancer Centre awarded to the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice.*

For parenting tips and advice, check out:

[www.parenting.nrdgp.org.au](http://www.parenting.nrdgp.org.au)



SPIKE SAYS

**“Vax’em.”**

[www.vaccination.org.au](http://www.vaccination.org.au)



[www.parenting.nrdgp.org.au](http://www.parenting.nrdgp.org.au)

For parents with children from newborn to around one year of age who are having difficulties, or require further support with: feeding (breast, weaning, bottle, solids); unsettled behaviour and related sleeping patterns; adjustment to parenthood issues for the family; postnatal distress; or parentcraft issues.

**ASK YOUR GP FOR A REFERRAL.**

## Division wins national award

The Northern Rivers Division of General Practice has won a national achievement award for its newest venture, Practice Staff Locums (PSL), set up to provide temporary staff to practices within the division's boundaries with the aim of relieving stress and taking the pressure off busy GPs.

The awards were announced at the Australian Divisions of General Practice national forum in Perth recently.

The division established Practice Staff Locums one year ago to provide practice nurses, practice managers, or receptionists to general practices. The service fills an identified workforce gap, with such a service having been requested by practices for some time. Challenges such as accreditation, times of high patient demand such as flu season, and staff shortages due to holidays, illness and resignations, can all result in high stress levels for staff in a practice.

“We set up Practice Staff Locums to provide a solution to these challenges,” chair of the division, Dr Tony Lembke, who accepted the award, said.

“Supporting our practices to care for their patients is the goal of our division, so we were thrilled the Practice Staff Locum project was recognised as the leader in the category of supporting quality in general practice.”

Since the success of the first PSL booking, practices have been embracing the locum service. One general practice was so



Dr Tony Lembke (centre) receives an award for the division's Practice Staff Locums project at the recent national divisions' forum. He is pictured with Dr Rob Walters, chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice and Shadow Minister for Health, Julia Gillard.

thrilled at the success of trialling a practice nurse through PSL that it decided to employ its first practice nurse. Another practice reported relief that they were given a reprieve whilst searching for new staff.

“GPs will be supported more and more by practice nurses and by other allied health staff in the future. Currently, about one third of practices in our division do not have their own practice nurse and the locum service is a great way for a practice to trial one,” Dr Lembke said.

The national divisions' achievement awards were started four years ago to recognise and acknowledge the achievements of divisions of general practice in everyday activities. The Northern Rivers division has been a finalist every year since the award's inception and won an award last year for its post natal day stay unit, The Northern Rivers Family Care Centre.

**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 call us on 6622 4453, or email [media@nrdgp.org.au](mailto:media@nrdgp.org.au). Thank you.