

GP Community Briefs

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

October 2005

Northern Rivers GPs lead the way

The crowd could not get enough of a group of local GPs and practice staff, whose stage performance of "Our Journey", a series of songs describing how they have improved their general practices, won them the most innovative and creative story award at the National Primary Care Collaboratives workshop in Melbourne recently.



Winners all. The team celebrate after their stage performance, which saw them singing songs composed by lyricist and musician Dr Pelmore (with help from the team of course), describing what they have done to improve their general practices.

The eight Northern Rivers general practices are part of a national program that aims to improve general practice and ultimately patient outcomes. The program has been adapted from a successful British model that continues to produce significant results.

"We are implementing some innovative programs to improve our patient's health here on the Northern Rivers," said Dr Tony Lembke, chair of the division and a GP in one of the participating practices.

"The Collaboratives program gives us a mechanism to share our achievements with other practices so that we don't keep reinventing the wheel. And of course we get to find out about the great ideas that other practices have already tested and refined."

Six of the eight local practices attending the national workshop gave presentations on specific quality improvements made to their practices. Innovations by the Nimbin Medical Centre and Family

Medical Ballina were awarded two of the top three awards.

"Nimbin Medical Centre has come up with ways to manage patients with heart disease proactively and Family Medical Ballina has improved patient access by re-assigning clinical work," Dr Lembke said.

"These are small, simple innovations but they have a big impact on how we practice and that has positive effects on the health of our patients and the service we can give them."

Eight more general practices are about to join the second phase of the program, with another eight to come on board early next year. Almost half the practices in the Northern Rivers area will have been involved in the program by its conclusion in 2008.

"The opportunity to work with our local colleagues has broadened our approach to achieving the best possible health in this region. It is an exciting program," Dr Lembke said.

Division shortlisted for national awards

The division has been shortlisted in four categories in the annual national divisions' achievement awards – every category it entered.

Each year, Australian Divisions of General Practice recognises programs of excellence throughout the national network of 120 divisions. Last year, the division won an award for the Northern Rivers Family Care Centre, the post natal day stay unit it manages. This year we hope to achieve recognition for some of our other programs.

Our projects will be competing with two other divisions in each category for recognition at the ADGP's annual conference to be held in Perth in November.

The Aboriginal Computer Network, a centralised patient database that means that doctors can access a patient's notes whether they present in Cabbage Tree Island of Tabulam for example, helps GPs to manage their Aboriginal patients better.

Practice Staff Locums is a project that provides locums to practices that need practice staff holiday or sick relief, or help with implementing practice nurse systems, training, or running specific clinics such as childhood immunisation or flu vaccination clinics.

The division's magazine, *GPSpeak*, which is sent to all GPs and a large number of specialists and health professionals in the area every two months, is a finalist in the Best Division Newsletter category.

The division's stable of websites, including two patient information websites, is a finalist in the Best Division Website category.

All at the division are delighted to be considered for the awards, reckoning each finalist would be a worthy winner. We will keep you informed of developments.



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.

For parenting tips and advice, check out:

www.parenting.nrdgp.org.au



Art therapy for young women in breast cancer support group

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.

We will be doing art therapy this month, so bring paints, crayons or pencils, paper supplied.

NOVEMBER Meeting:
Wednesday 2 November
Time: 10.00am to 12.00pm
Location: Lismore Community Health, Level 3, 29 Molesworth St, Lismore.

Guest speaker: Katherine Morrison, oncology social work counsellor.

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 division on 6622 4453.

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.

Same day appointments to improve patient access in Nimbin

Nimbin Medical Centre is introducing a same day appointment system this month.

“For some time now we have been very aware that our patients have had difficulties in obtaining appointments,” Dr Oscar Serrallach, one of the two GPs at the clinic, said.

“This is a problem in Nimbin due to a shortage of doctors. It is very frustrating and stressful for all concerned – patients, receptionists and doctors.”

From Monday 17 October, patients will be offered one of the 10 available appointments on the day they phone with either Dr Serrallach or Dr Jacqueline Boustany, whether for a routine or urgent matter. No routine bookings are being made beyond this date, however patients who need follow up appointments with their doctor will be booked in.

“Our aim is to minimise appointment delay and we hope it will provide a solution for Nimbin that will provide better access to medical services, and at the same time reduce the ‘pressure cooker’ level of stress on doctors, staff and patients.”

Both doctors said the first few weeks would be a learning process for staff and doctors at the centre, but that the new booking system was based on successful models being run elsewhere.

“We are committed to finding a solution that will have a positive outcome for all of us. We ask you to be patient with us during this change period, especially during the first few days after 17 October.”

The staff at Nimbin Medical Centre will also



Nimbin GPs Oscar Serrallach and Jacqueline Boustany.

begin to conduct regular Tuesday afternoon clinics focusing on metabolic disorders, such as diabetes and heart disease. They aim to provide proactive, managed care to patients with these chronic diseases to minimise complications and enhance life.



SPIKE SAYS

“Vax’em”

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. Thank you.