

House Call

Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee of the IDGP

Volume 2, Issue 1

April 2001

The Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) is an organisation which supports and represents General Practitioners. It was developed to provide opportunities for GPs to work with their local colleagues, consumers and other health or community services. It aims to achieve wider health improvements in the community.

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Corporate Trends

One of the issues the IDGP Community Committee is currently pursuing is the corporatisation of General Practice. This trend has enormous impact on both consumers and general practitioners. Many GPs (particularly sole practitioners) are having pressure placed on them to sell their practices and become part of a larger medical centre. In one Sydney suburb it is understood that as many as 18 doctors have been bought out and corporatised.

Driven by income incentives, these doctors may be encouraged by the corporation to push patients through at ten-minute intervals to maximise their income payment. This system also puts pressure on practice staff as to

which doctor patients are allocated. There may also be pressure for the doctors of these practices to refer to specified services such as radiology or pathology where the corporation may have other financial interests.

This is not necessarily a quality health service for consumers. We all know sometimes we may only require a short visit, but other times we may require a longer appointment with the GP of our choice. To build a trusting and comfortable relationship a discussion of more than a ten-minute time limit is required. Also, our suburban neighbourhood businesses are part of our community. Large businesses are inclined to promote the corporate line

and not engender themselves to become part of our communities. The same is likely with the corporatisation of general practices. The lure of the dollar is strong and persistent.



The Community Committee has expressed our concerns to our GPs and written to our local MPs asking what the Federal Government is doing to understand, analyse and respond to these significant changes that are sweeping through the Australian health system. We encourage you to do the same to resist the push to monetary medicine.

Brianna Smith
Editor

Nominations Invited for Community Committee

Nominations for four positions on the Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) Community Consultative Committee are invited from consumer representatives with an interest in general practice issues. There are three positions available for a two-year term and one available for a one-year term, commencing 1 June 2001.

The Community Committee has an important role

in identifying health consumers' needs and improving general practice health care in the Illawarra region. The committee is made up of a total of eight community members who represent geographical regions of the Illawarra as well as different interest groups. There are also three GP representatives on the committee. The consumer representatives listen to the concerns of their communities and outline these to the GP represen-

tatives. At the same time, they can help to convey GPs' issues to the community.

A nomination form and information sheets are included with this newsletter, or can be obtained by phoning Louisa Raft at the IDGP office on (02) 4226 7052, or by visiting the IDGP Website at www.idgp.org.au. Nominations close at 5.00pm, Monday 30 April 2001.



Consumer Representative Margaret Chadwick

Introducing Margaret Chadwick

If you need a wound stitched or a bone set, she can't help you. But as a member of the IDGP Community Committee Margaret Chadwick can take your concerns about aspects of general practice, in particular aged care, to the committee for discussion and action.

Margaret was born in Liverpool, England, some time before Beatlemania rocked the world. No, she didn't know Ringo as a lad, even though she lived within walking distance of his home! After leaving school at 15, she trained as a shorthand typist and bookkeeper, skills which have been useful during her years of committee work.

As "ten quid migrants", Margaret and husband Frank arrived in Sydney in February 1957. They have a son and two daughters. After a few months in a migrant hostel they moved to Austinmer, living in a pretty cottage perched on

the edge of a cliff. "In any migrant's wildest dreams we couldn't wish for a better position," she says.

Margaret is a woman with a mission. With one of her daughters' special needs in mind, her passion is the health and welfare of people with disabilities, particularly the vexed question of permanent, appropriate accommodation. "There are so many people with disabilities still being cared for by elderly parents. It is frightening to think what will happen if a crisis occurs."

Pursuing this issue, Margaret has attended innumerable meetings, been part of a team researching the needs and has sat on countless committees.

For the past 24 years she has been Secretary to the Para Meadows Ex-Students' Association and is a member of Bethzatha Fellowship, an organisation of the Catholic Church concerned

with the social and spiritual welfare of people with disabilities. She is also a member of the Bishop's Council for People with Disabilities and their Families.

When she has time to relax, Margaret enjoys crossword puzzles, "to keep the brain active", the occasional swim, writing, reading and music. A few years ago she joined the Older Women's Network. "I particularly enjoy this because for a short time, I can get off the disability treadmill," says Margaret. The other great love of her life is her 13-year-old grandson, Simon.

As a member of the Community Committee, Margaret attends regular meetings with the Illawarra Retirement Trust and with the Department of Community Services. She feels a close relationship between the IDGP and these two bodies can only result in benefits on both sides.

If you are interested in raising your concerns through the Community Committee you can contact the Illawarra Division of General Practice on phone 02 4226 7052. Your details will be given to the relevant Community Committee member.

Compeer - Friendship is Powerful Medicine

All of us know that occasionally someone befriends us and touches our lives and cares about our well-being without expecting anything in return.



Because they believe in us, we are encouraged

to believe in ourselves.

The Compeer Program brings sensitive, caring individuals and people diagnosed with a mental health disorder, together in a one-to-one friendship relationship. Trained community volunteers meet with their friend for four hours a month, for a minimum of one year. The type of activity they share is mutually agreed upon and may include sharing a

coffee, going for a walk along the beach, or seeing a movie together.

The Compeer program originated in Rochester, New York, in 1973. The program was brought to Australia in 1996, and has been operating in the Illawarra since March 2000.

Compeer Illawarra is supported by St Vincent de Paul Society and Centacare. If you are interested in

finding out more about the program, please contact Jane Crowe, Coordinator, on phone (02) 4254 9337.

Illawarra Brain Injury Service (IBIS)



IBIS provides outpatient community-based rehabilitation to residents of the Illawarra, aged between 15 and 55 years

Your Health Information ... Your Rights

We are all aware that GPs keep patient medical records, but are you aware of your rights regarding access to these records?

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has addressed the issue of patient access to information contained in their medical record in their *Code of Practice for the Management of Health Information in General Practice (June 1998)*.

Did you know ...

- Your GP has both a legal and ethical obligation to inform you fully about your medical condition and treatment.
- Your GP should maintain a full, accurate and up-to-date summary of your medical record.

Information in your record can be provided to you by way of this summary at your request, for example, if you are transferring to a new doctor, or require the

information for any other reason.

- Your GP needs to consider that it may be unethical for her/him to disclose to you information in your record which may have been given in confidence by a third party (eg family member)
- In some cases, your GP may consider there to be reasonable grounds to deny access to information in your medical record. Such grounds may include the risk of mental or physical harm to you or someone else. If your request is refused, your GP should explain the reasons why.
- The provision of a summary or access to your medical record should always be accompanied by an explanation by your GP, and any concerns you have should be discussed.
- If you consider any information in the record to be inaccurate, your GP should document this in

your record and make a note as to whether she/he agrees. For legal reasons, entries in a medical record must not be altered or erased.

- Medicare only covers the explanation of your medical record if it occurs as part of a medical consultation.
- Depending on what is involved, provision of your health information summary or copy of your medical record should only incur a minimum charge, if any. This will be at the discretion of your GP.

Sharing of information is important in the doctor/patient relationship. This allows for optimal communication and high quality health care.

Mary Jack

Information in this article has been summarised from the RACGP *Code of Practice for the Management of Health Information in General Practice (June 1998)*. Copies of the Code of Practice are available by contacting the RACGP on 1800 331 626.



"Sharing of information is important in the doctor/patient relationship. This allows for optimal communication and high quality health care."

Community Focus

that have sustained a brain injury that is non-progressive in nature.

The team at IBIS consists of a Rehabilitation Specialist, Speech Pathologist, Social Worker, Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Occupational Therapists, and a Paediatric & Adolescent Coordinator. Services available include case management, occupational therapy,

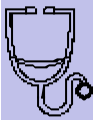
speech pathology, counselling, anger management, memory strategies, driving assessments, and a range of psychological and other services. The Paediatric & Adolescent Coordinator provides service coordination and support to school aged children who have sustained a brain injury and their family. For more information call IBIS on (02) 4276 4717.

Wollongong Multiple Birth Association

Provides opportunity for parents in similar situations to discuss and compare any special problems or phases of development of their multiple birth children, and any special effect these children may have on their family environment. The Multiple Birth Association is a non-commercial, non-sectarian and non-profit

organisation, cooperating with other organisations which have related interests. Services provided include a library, bi-monthly newsletters, monthly meetings, breast pump and pram hire, and playdays. Literature is also provided to members to keep updated on research regarding multiples. For more information call the Secretary on (02) 4256 0836.





Health Tips - Avoiding clots with travel

There has been a lot of media attention recently concerning "long haul" flights and a condition known as Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). DVT is the term used for the formation of a clot in a vein due to blood flow being impeded. Clots occur most often in the veins of the legs or pelvis. Many risk factors can interfere with the normal flow of blood, eg prolonged immobility, previous history of clots, cancer, recent surgery, obesity, heart conditions, oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy, family history of DVT.

DVT may be less common if travellers

- avoid alcohol
 - avoid sleeping tablets
 - avoid smoking
 - drink plenty of non-alcoholic drinks
 - keep feet and calf muscles active
 - don't let bags etc on the floor squash up against their calves
 - talk to their doctor before they travel if they have any risk factors.
- Graduated compression stockings and aspirin may be helpful. Heparin injections may be needed. Travel may be inadvisable.

Dr John Watson

Illawarra Division of General Practice Community Committee

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Your Community Representatives

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GP Representatives

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Disability Assistance Kit

For people with a disability and their carers. Explains services and payments available through Centrelink and provides contact details for various support organisations in the Illawarra. Available from the office of Stephen Martin MP. Phone 4283 4111.

The Commonwealth Seniors' Health Card

is available to people who are Australian residents of **age pension age** and are **not** receiving an age pension. This card entitles you to cheaper prescription medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). By showing your card to the pharmacist you will be entitled to prescriptions for \$3.50. It also entitles the holder to free emergency ambulance. There are income limits for the qualification of this card. These limits have increased since July 2000. To find out more, call the Seniors Information Service on 13 12 44, Monday - Friday.

We're on the Web!
www.idgp.org.au

The Next Edition of "House Call" is August 2001.

Information for inclusion should be received by 6 July 2001.

What's Happening at the Division?

Board News

At the Division's December Board meeting, Ms Brianna Smith and Ms Monica Lowe were reappointed as Consumer Representatives to the IDGP Board for another one-year term. With her reappointment, Monica also continues as Chair of the Community Committee. As Board Members, Brianna and Monica have full participation and voting

rights, and fulfil the important role of liaison between the Community Committee and the Board. They are responsible for bringing the Community Committee's recommendations to the Board for consideration.

Receptionist Training

Two of the Division's staff members have developed a training program for practice staff in GP

surgeries using a common patient management software program. The IDGP has supported many GPs to computerise and this training program represents one of the first of its kind to support practice staff in GP surgeries. The first workshops were conducted in late March with much enthusiasm from those participating. All sessions were fully booked!



IDGP Community Committee