

House Call

Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee of the IDGP

Volume 3, Issue 3

December 2002



IDGP Community Committee

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.

Inside this issue:

Separation and Suicide	1
New roles, new faces on the CCC	2
Muslim Health a Community Issue	3
Suicide Support Group	3
Family weights on programme	3
Health Tips - Heart Attack and Stroke	4
About your CCC	4

Separation and Suicide



By House Call Editor and Consumer Representative Brianna Smith

A comment by one of the Community Committee's GP's has raised the Committee's awareness of the issue of separation and suicide (particularly male suicide) – indeed, not only suicide but also the impact of separation and divorce on the health and well being of all family members.

Men tend to be the main income earners in the majority of families. However, it appears that while the Family Court is encouraging divorced parents to be involved with their children and joint custody is sought in most cases, the Child Support Agency (CSA) can make such outcomes difficult to achieve. This in turn is affecting families and their health.

Fathers on low incomes with two dependent children sometimes can be required to pay half their disposable income in child support. Higher income earners in some cases can end up with a disposable income less than their annual tax bill. Others can pay up to 80 % of their salary. The repercussions of such situations are of enormous consequence to the community.

Many fathers accept agreements that give them little contact with their children because they can no longer afford the money, time or the emotional strength to fight to see their kids. Many are devastated to have the Court rule them non-custodial parents. Some take drastic steps.

One suicide victim was reported as having a letter from the CSA in his hand. From anecdotal evidence there appears to be a number of cases where a father could not go on any longer and deliberately drove his vehicle off the road into an accident. Firm local suicide statistics - particularly as they relate to family breakup – are not readily available, but there appears significant numbers.

Not having enough money to live on, especially if there's a second family to support, can greatly affect self-esteem and personal pride. This in turn can influence mental health, with depression, alcohol and substance abuse, violence and poor nutrition ranking high among other problems. This impacts greatly on how the children function at school and in society - let alone its impact on their dads' usual functioning. "Quality time" together is unlikely in such scenarios.

The health cost to society is obviously enormous. Not only for the men involved but also their children, family and former partners. The long-term effect on how the children will maintain future relationships and how they will fulfill their own parenting roles is also open to question.

There are services available to help and a visit to a GP is a good start. Informing our Federal politicians about what is really happening out there is another positive step.

Source: Men's Rights Agency

New roles, new faces on the CCC

'A healthy committee means a healthier community...'

At its September meeting, the Board of the Illawarra Division of General Practice elected Community Consultative Committee member Dimity Simes as the Consumer Representative to the IDGP Board. Dimity therefore also takes over the position of Chairperson of the CCC.

As we congratulate Dimity and wish her every success in her new roles, we also join to thank outgoing Chair and Consumer Representative to the IDGP Board, Brianna Smith, for her valuable contribution during the past two years. Brianna continues with the CCC in her role of representing health consumers in the middle-age portfolio.

Meanwhile, two new representatives were welcomed recently to the Community Consultative Committee to help facilitate Illawarra GPs' identification of consumer views and needs and so improve health services through the Illawarra Division of General Practice.

They are Illawarra residents Helen Gapps, who now represents Illawarra's mature age health consumers, and Maristela Stjepanovic, representing health consumers of a non-English speaking background.

Helen Gapps is an active retiree with extensive networking in the Illawarra. She has wide contacts through her volunteer work and her membership of such community organisations as Probus Club.

"Everybody I know is concerned about health care," says Helen. "I feel I have an ongoing, detailed background from which I can draw to assist my participation as a consumer representative.

"Older health consumers seem to be concerned about such things as bulk billing, home visits by doctors, understanding treatment procedures and costs and the accessibility of a wide range of paramedical services. These are some of the things I hope to discuss at committee level. As well, I hope to be able to use my education background and skills to inform the older community about the concerns of general practitioners in the Illawarra region.

"I believe a healthy committee, with plenty of two-way communication between consumers and doctors, makes for a healthier community."

Maristela Stjepanovic was a legal worker in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Zagreb, Croatia before migrating to Australia. She has lived

in Wollongong for six years and is now a community development worker with the Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre. She is currently on secondment to Wollongong City Council's community development team.

"My community work started with individual case management for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia," says Stela. "I actively participate in local and regional migrant community networks and with the agencies providing services for those communities.

"Through my experience in community work I have developed liaison with established non-English speaking communities such as Italian, Macedonian, Filipino, Chinese, Croatian, Portuguese and Serbian and built strong working relationships with non-English speaking community workers in the Illawarra. This will enable me to bring broad representation to the committee's NESB portfolio."

If you would like to raise issues with your CCC representatives regarding older-age patients of GPs or patients from a non-English speaking background, please contact the Community Relations Manager at the IDGP on 4226 7052.



New CCC member Helen Gapps represents mature age consumers.



Joining the CCC in the NESB portfolio is Maristela Stjepanovic.



Dimity Simes is now appointed to the IDGP Board and takes over as Chair of the CCC.

Muslim Health a Community Issue

The problems facing Muslim citizens in our local and wider communities - particularly as they impact on health - was the keynote of discussion at a recent CCC meeting.

The Committee welcomed two Islamic guest speakers: Bellambi pharmacist Mr Hussain and Cringila Arabic-speaking multicultural health worker Ms Eman Baghdadi.

Their message was clear. As a consequence of retaliation against what is seen by some to be "Islamic" terrorism, Muslims are at-risk of poor mental health (stress, anxiety, and depression), living in a state of harassment, fear and isolation. Muslims also perceived their local community as under-resourced to deal with the medical needs of Muslim women.

The Committee was told there are 5,000 Muslims in the Illawarra, with 2,000 speaking Arabic.

Mr Hussain spoke of the immediate effects on the Australian Muslim community following the September 11 terrorist attacks in North America. He said specific incidents of racism against Muslims occurred in the Illawarra. There were also security issues for mosques and public events. A local mosque had been unable to obtain insurance. The personal security of Muslim leaders had been threatened and Muslim women and children were also targeted.

However, Mr Hussain said there were also incidents of genuine support for Muslims in the Illawarra - in fact, Illawarra Muslims felt the least levels of prejudice. Even so, feelings of isolation and of not belonging in Australia were strong.

Ms Baghdadi told the committee there was a lack of Arabic-speaking counsellors to help Muslim people in the local community deal with their fear and depression. There was a need for a counsellor who understood Arabic culture and Islamic beliefs.

There was also a need for female GPs, as this is the preference of many Muslim women. An option was to have a female staff member present in the room while a male GP performs an examination. Similarly, the need for a Turkish social worker was noted - as the majority of the local Muslim community is made up of Arabic-speaking and Turkish people.

The committee received enlightening presentations from both speakers, who also gave very informative answers to a range of questions from committee members.

Muslim patients and carers can seek help in dealing with these issues and in communicating more effectively with their general practitioners.

Eman Baghdadi can provide assistance to Illawarra GPs and their Muslim and Arabic-speaking patients. Arabic language resources and cultural information are available.

To obtain assistance, contact Eman Baghdadi, Multicultural Health, on 4274 6233.

Family weights on programme

Working as a family to lead a healthy lifestyle - with an emphasis on good eating and weight control - is the focus of a program conducted in Wollongong by paediatric dietician Jane Wishart.

She told *Housecall* that research shows parents and carers serve as role models, influencing children's eating habits and activities.

"Obesity is recognised by the World Health Organisation as a silent epidemic whose worldwide prevalence has increased dramatically in adults and children," Ms Wishart said.

"Parents and carers can help children with weight problems by providing an emotional and physical environment which supports a healthy lifestyle.

"Although genetics account for 25-40%, the increase in obesity in Westernised communities is due to dramatic changes in the environment with many people leading less

Suicide Support Group

Have you or someone you know been bereaved through suicide? Would you like to join a support group? This group meets the first Tuesday of every month at Uniting Church Hall, Crown Street, Wollongong. **Phone: 4296 6633. Ask for Sue or Maree.**

active lifestyles and having easy access to high-fat foods."

In Australia, obesity in childhood and adolescence is following this global trend. Research indicates 20-25% of Australian children and adolescents are overweight. Obesity now appears to be the second most prevalent chronic disease in adolescence in Australia, after asthma.

So Illawarra Health introduced this family-based weight management program. It targets parents and carers of two to twelve-year olds. Each group attends eight evenings over a two-month period.

Qualified dieticians and a psychologist run these groups. The dietician can also see children with their parents or carers on an individual basis.

For further details contact Louise Watts or Jane Wishart at Wollongong Hospital on 42225348.

Health Tips – Heart Attack and Stroke

...know the warning signs

The ability to recognise symptoms of heart attack and stroke will make a world of difference to your reaction when faced with such an emergency. In both situations, medical attention is required immediately.

Heart Attack:

A person suffering heart attack may have pain in the centre of their chest for 10 to 15-minutes or longer. The pain or discomfort spreads to other areas such as the jaw, throat, arms and upper body. This person may feel sick and sweaty and appear pale.

Hospital:

Coronary care beds are available at Wollongong, Bulli and Shellharbour.

Stroke or 'Brain Attack':

A person suffering stroke may have blurred vision, speech difficulty, loss of feeling, pins and needles in the face or an arm or leg, dizziness, paralysis or weakness in parts of the body and sometimes, a headache.

Hospital:

Stroke beds are available at Wollongong.

CALL AN AMBULANCE – QUICKLY!

1. Dial 000.
2. Ask for the ambulance service.
3. Report a heart attack or stroke.
4. Have the patient rest quietly, laying in a semi-upright position, while waiting for assistance.
5. If no ambulance is available (such as in a rural location), notify the nearest hospital or health clinic, and arrange alternative transport maintaining the patient in a semi-upright position.

Be prepared to respond in an emergency. Most importantly with heart attack and stroke, every minute counts – the smaller the damage, the better the quality of life afterwards.

Don't attempt to drive to your doctor's surgery – use your telephone or have someone use it for you.

Paramedics have experience in treating patients at home, in the work place or public places such as clubs and supermarkets.

Be aware and be prepared!

Dr George Puris

Illawarra Division of General Practice Community Consultative Committee

Editor

Brianna Smith

Postal Address

PO Box 1198

South Coast Mail Centre NSW 2521

Business Address

Suite 3, Level 1,

336 Keira Street

Wollongong NSW 2500

Phone: (02) 4226 7052

Fax: (02) 4226 9485

Web Site: www.idgp.org.au

E-mail: idgp@idgp.org.au

Your Community Representatives:

Chairperson Dimity Simes

Helen Gapps

Christina Bjork

Maristela Stjepanovic

Jenni Vaughan-Floyd

GP Representatives

Jim Turner

George Puris

About your CCC ...

The Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) supports and represents GPs from Helensburgh to Gerroa (some 85% are members). The Community Consultative Committee (CCC) provides a way for GPs and patients to understand each other's needs.

Since its formation in 1999, the CCC has proven a positive forum, giving community input to such issues as medical records ownership and access, surgery waiting times, GP accreditation, availability of GP services on public holidays, and resources for health consumers in languages other than English. It also conducted a community forum on childhood obesity.

Anyone can approach the CCC to raise topics with the IDGP on their behalf.

Portfolios include General representation, Carer, Youth, Middle Age, Older Age and NESB.

The CCC is currently seeking nominations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation.

The IDGP's CCC representatives can be contacted via the IDGP on 4226 7052 during normal business hours.

The Next Edition of "House Call" is March 2003. Information for inclusion should be received by 5 February 2003.