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Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee of the IDGP

## Editorial



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.

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Welcome to this my second edition of House Call as your new editor. I was recently fortunate enough to be asked to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual State Forum run by the Alliance of NSW Divisions. This was my first time at this type of Forum, and as a consumer it was a most interesting and informative session. As a result of some of the information shared at the forum I feel that there are some important issues for our community that should be raised in the Illawarra and through our Committee.

Another recent achievement from the Community Consultative Committee was the hosting of our Community Forum on 22 September entitled "Medicines: Healing or Harming!" This forum provided practical advice on how to manage your medications safely and effectively, information on the wise use of complementary medicines and provided the community with an opportunity to ask our panel of experts questions about medications. It was a most informative night and

I would like to thank all the volunteers who helped make this a great event. Thank you also to our wonderful speakers who did so much to make it a success.

Again if you have any items or input that you might like to see in House Call, please send them to me. I welcome any input that you might have to make this your Newsletter.

Edger du Bois

## Your Community Consultative Committee

The Community Consultative Committee (or CCC as it is more commonly referred to) is a committee of the Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP) and aims to provide a link between the Illawarra community and the IDGP and general practitioners. The CCC allows for consumers of general practice services to have a voice in the provision of those services, but at the same time also provides an avenue for GPs and the IDGP to feedback important information into the community.

The CCC is made up of eight consumer representatives and two GP representatives, who meet regularly with the IDGP to discuss various issues.

The current members of the CCC are:

**Helen Gapps** – Chairperson and Age: Older (60 years and over) representative

**Janet Pinney** – Age: Middle (26 - 60 years) representative

**Nghi Tran** – Non English Speaking Background representative

**Nola Gardner** – Carer (of people with disabilities, or children, or aged) representative

**Louise Robinson** – General/Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Representative

**Edger du Bois** – General/Youth Representative

**Susan Ring** – General/Youth Representative

**Will Temple** – General Representative

**Dr Jim Turner** – GP Representative

**Dr Les Miller** – GP Representative

If you have any issues or questions about the provision of health services through general practice, or require information that will help with your understanding of the provision of these health services, please feel free to contact the CCC and any of the above representatives via the IDGP office on Ph: 4226 7052 or you can email the CCC on: [ccc@idgp.org.au](mailto:ccc@idgp.org.au)

## Healthy Relationships

One of the delights of General Practice is being able to listen to people. Apart from the symptoms of various ailments, I also hear many interesting things about holidays, sports, people and relationships.

Women visit GPs more often, so we hear more from them about relationships and their men.

Prevention has had increasing emphasis in general practice in recent years. It is better to intervene early when the problem is less serious, whether it is a skin lump or a struggling relationship.

Women initiate most relationship breakups, usually some considerable time after things start to go wrong. Often these problems begin in two areas.

Showing love and appreciation on a regular basis is one area that men do not do as well as they might. It helps if the woman feels special. Generally the ways in which we show care for another person fall into five categories: words of encouragement, quality time, gifts, touch and acts of service (Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman). All of these are important, but usually a person will express their love primarily in one of these ways, and usually that is the expression of love which is most meaningful to them.

How differences of opinion and conflicts are handled is the second main area of concern. The use of violence, humiliation, verbal abuse and withdrawal are unhelpful ways of dealing with disagreements and problems.

When a GP spends time with a couple who have problems resolving conflicts, the doctor will seek to encourage and model skills in listening, seeking to understand the other person rather than trying to blame. Each person is also helped to focus on what they can do, rather than being preoccupied with what the other person should do. Forgiveness is another important though sometimes difficult issue to deal with.

In observing strong marriages, I have noted that couples often work at making the relationship unique. Regular “date nights”, pet names, intimate routines, special places and songs and particular celebrations are some of the ways in which this may occur.

So if your relationship problems are not being handled satisfactorily, your family GP can be a valuable resource and helpful in a range of ways. Sometimes they will also refer you to someone else for additional assistance.

Dr Les Miller  
General Practitioner

## Coping with Conflict in Relationships

The way many men cope with relationship issues can be a disadvantage when things go wrong. Many men find it difficult to confide in others and feel that asking for help is a sign of inadequacy, says Wollongong GP, Dr Jim Turner.

Dr Turner has been instrumental in forming a support group in Wollongong for men experiencing the pain of separation, called *dids* – *Dads in Distress*.

“Women can often work through the emotions they are feeling by talking with friends, whereas men tend to keep it all locked inside,” said Dr Turner.

“It is normal for partners to feel emotions such as loneliness, confusion, guilt, anger or even feeling worthless. It is better for men’s health if they can speak about these feelings” says Dr Turner, “when we hide our pain it affects our mental and physical wellbeing”.

Sometimes men’s coping mechanisms can be even more damaging to their health. Some men withdraw from their friends or spend too much time at work; others cope by using substances like alcohol or even drugs to dull the pain.

“Many of my patients have had trouble eating and sleeping and even focussing at work following the trauma of separation. Talking to someone usually helps them to see the issues more clearly,” said Dr Turner.

Relationship conflict is a major issue in for our community. Each year in Australia there are around 52,00 divorces and 70,000 separations – a figure which includes couples living in long term de facto relationships.

Besides friends and family, there are other people men can turn to, including GPs, counsellors, ministers of religion or some community associations.

Organisations providing counselling for people affected by separation and divorce include: Anglicare Counselling 4228 9612; Relationships Australia 4228 7711; Unifam Marriage Family Counselling 4229 9863 and Centacare 4227 1122. For 24 hour telephone counselling there is also Lifeline on 131 114. The Family Law Reform Association (Sutherland) number is 9452 2459.

The *dids* support group, for men going through separation and divorce, meets every Thursday from 6pm – 9pm, in the Centacare building, 25 – 27 Auburn St, Wollongong. For further information about this group you can contact Ph: 4229 4289.

“If you know someone experiencing relationship conflict, try to give them opportunities to talk and try to listen without giving advice or passing judgement,” said Dr Turner.

# Delaying the Onset of Dementia – What Can Be Done??

With our ageing population, the incidence of dementia in all its forms is becoming much more common. Unfortunately there is no actual effective treatment as yet, with three major drugs being used for it, none of which seem to be like the ‘penicillin’ of years ago for infection. Care constitutes the major treatment at the present time and this is quite expensive. It would be preferable to be able to delay the illness from progressing.

Loneliness, isolation and depression, I feel are the major factors in accelerating the process of dementia. This, in turn, is associated with the loss of some of the senses eg: hearing, vision, smell and taste. Annual screening tests to detect the loss of these senses and then appropriate intervention might be one way in slowing the progression of the illness. The Home Medicines Review seems to be a good way of ensuring compliance with medication. Perhaps the pantry should be reviewed regularly as well. It is surprising how many out-of-date of salt laden packaged products are in the pantry. There is a Webster pack for medicines, why not a Webster style pack for food using a deep freeze – good nutrition is vital for the elderly. It is great to see that there are a number of people attempting

to involve our seniors in many activities eg: exercise, line dancing, bus trips, singsongs, day care with craft groups, Probus, and University of the Third Age. We have seen however that family work commitments mean that many of our aged are now living a long way from their families. Modern technology could play an important role in helping older people maintain contact with relatives and friends via e-mails with letters and photos. Often the initial reaction of the elderly when they are approached with the concept of e-mails is “I would not know the first thing about a computer”. However, it would be great to see our young people acting as mentors and helping older people with computer use and e-mailing and encouraging the seniors to gradually take over the process. When this is mastered, there are other avenues that could be utilised such as online shopping, attending a church service online, tuning into seniors online. Also in the pipeline is a lot of computer technology which may assist in allowing people to maintain their independence, and a fuller existence. This all helps people deal with the most crushing emotion – that is loneliness, which leads to isolation, depression and to an increase in dementia.

Dr Jim Turner

## Dementia – A Carer’s Perspective

From a carer’s perspective, the service given to some Alzheimer’s patients in the surgery or in the hospital could be greatly enhanced if more regard was given to the contribution the carer can make through their opinions and observation. There is nothing like experience and if a person is living 24-hour care, surely they must have something to contribute on behalf of their partner or patient to make the caring job easier for the professional, be it doctor, nurse or service provider.

Some of the reports of the unreal expectations of staff dealing with dementia patients are disturbing and dangerous, it is hoped that training and awareness will see an improvement in this area of care.

As the number of dementia patients is escalating, I can only hope that by working together, the caring can be made easier for all involved.

Nola Gardner  
Carer Representative, CCC

## Services for People with Dementia and their Carers

### **Carunya: Dementia Day Therapy Centre & Carer Support Service**

The Carunya centre offers support, information, and counselling for carers of people who have dementia. They also offer a day respite centre for people with dementia.  
Ph: 4297 1011 or 4297 1082 (Mon – Thurs)

### **Illawarra Dementia Respite Service (Wollongong City Council)**

Provides flexible respite to carers of people with dementia.  
Ph: 4227 7464

### **Shellharbour/ Kiama Dementia Respite Project**

Planned respite options for carers of people with moderate to severe dementia who live in the Shellharbour & Kiama LGAs.  
Ph: 4257 9036

### **Dementia Helpline (Alzheimer’s Association)**

Support for carers & families of those with dementing illnesses.  
Ph: 1800 639 331

### **Carers NSW (Carers Resource Centre)**

Provides carers with information about services available, including contact details of support groups and other local service providers.  
Ph: 1800 242 636

### **Commonwealth Carers Respite Centre**

Links carers to respite, including home based and residential respite in their local area.  
Ph: 1800 059 059

# The Doctors Priority Line – Telephone Interpreting Service

Do you know of someone who may need access to an interpreter to talk to their doctor? Doctors are able to use a service called the Doctors Priority Line, a free telephone interpreting service for doctors or specialists to help them communicate with their patients who do not speak English. The service is provided through TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service) and has interpreters available in 100 different languages. When a person visits their doctor, the doctor can use the service to access an interpreter straight away or they can book a telephone interpreting service for a later time.

When a doctor uses the Doctors Priority Line, his or her call is given priority and an interpreter will generally be provided within three minutes (for major community languages). This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across Australia.

The role of the interpreter is to facilitate accurate communication with people who do not speak English, or whose English is not adequate. Interpreters are bound by a professional code of ethics which requires them to:

- interpret information accurately and honestly without adding or omitting anything being said;
- maintain absolute confidentiality;
- be impartial and objective;
- act in a professional manner at all times.

A doctor can access or book an interpreter for a patient at any time by calling the Doctors Priority Line on **1300 131 450**.

## THE NEED FOR QUALITY, SIMPLE INFORMATION – The Seniors Information Service, Ph: 13 12 44

Today there is so much information available for the consumer, the need for quality, simple information is more important than ever. So many decisions in our lives are affected by the information that we obtain so that the need to acquire the correct information is vital. With so much information available how do we access what is important to us?

'At Seniors Information Service we have a unique, centralised first stop shop which provides information on all issues which are of concern to older people', says Barbara Lorback, Manager of the service. The service was launched in 1996, and is funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. To date the service has responded to more than 200,000 calls from all over NSW. On most days the professional staff handle over 200 calls.

Without pushing buttons all the members of the community can obtain our regularly updated information. This can be given to the caller in a number of ways: by phone, fax, mail or referral. If the caller requires referral, the Seniors Information Service provides a business linking service at no cost to the caller.

'Our service covers Centrelink entitlements, Retirement accommodation, Concessions, Legal Information, Health Services, Education, Senior citizens clubs and much more' says Barbara. 'We use a Telephone Interpreter Services to give culturally and linguistically diverse people access to information'. Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are included in our database. Our service is certainly a quality, simple service and is appreciated by the community for its facility of phoning straight through to a REAL PERSON with no need to push buttons. It can be accessed on Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm by phoning 13 12 44.

### Illawarra Division of General Practice Community Consultative Committee

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