

Please copy and circulate this newsletter. Thank you.



Volume 6
Issue 2

August 2005



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:

Editorial	1
Illawarra Family Doctor Awards 2005	1
Latest News from the CCC	1
Anxiety, Depression, Alcohol & Young People	2
Social Isolation	3
Organ Donation for Transplant?	3
Working Carers Support Gateway	4

Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee of the IDGP

Editorial

Welcome to another exciting issue of House Call. I hope that you will find this issue of interest.

Some of the issues that this edition of House Call addresses are; social isolation, organ donation, and anxiety, depression and alcohol in

young people. We have also included some information about the upcoming Family Doctor Awards for 2005 and a new website support service for working carers.

Please remember that this newsletter is for you and if there are any items of interest

that you might want to have published please contact us and we will endeavour to include these in future editions.

Enjoy reading this issue and I look forward to some of your items.

Edger du Bois

Illawarra Family Doctor Awards 2005

Do you have an extraordinary GP or does the general practice you attend provide an excellent and outstanding service? Then why not nominate your GP or Practice for an Illawarra Family Doctor Award!

The IDGP's Illawarra GP and Practice of the Year Awards provide an opportunity for local GPs and Practices to be recognised for outstanding services they provide to our community.

You can nominate your GP or Practice by filling out a

nomination form that you can obtain from your doctor or from the IDGP's website at www.idgp.org.au.

Nominations will be assessed by members of the IDGP's Community Consultative Committee. For more information about the awards please contact Beth Bignell on 4226 7052.

Here is one of the comments from a nomination last year:

"I have recently been very ill with shingles. Dr Kirk has called into my home on many occasions,

even on weekends. I would have been lost without him. He diagnosed my shingles and gave me the medication within the first 48 hours which saved me months of suffering. He gave me the confidence and strength I needed to get through this illness. Dr Kirk's surgery has been really helpful. With just a phone call he will fax a prescription to the chemist or call in to check on me. Any time of day or night he will take my call. When I lost my wife he was there at 2am in the morning to support me."

Latest News from the CCC

What your CCC has been working on!

Here are some of the issues your Community Consultative Committee (CCC) has been working on over the last few months:

- ◆ Problems of access associated with the high cost of specialist fees, particularly for people with low incomes.
- ◆ The amalgamation of the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Services.
- ◆ GP services to marginalised groups of people within our community.
- ◆ Issues surrounding the provision of

appropriate care by health services to people with dementia.

Would you like to talk to a member of our CCC about any of these issues or another concern or question you may have in regards to the provision of health services, especially general practice services in the Illawarra? Then why don't you drop a line to your local Community Committee either by:
Phone: 4226 7052
e-mail: ccc@idgp.org.au

Post: Community Consultative Committee
Illawarra Division of General Practice
PO Box 1198
Wollongong NSW 2500

Anxiety, Depression, Alcohol and Young People: Why is it important to seek help?

Anxiety, depression and alcohol problems have a complex relationship where each can make the other worse. These problems are common and can occur together for many people of all ages, including young people.

Anxiety, depression and alcohol problems can vary widely in form and severity. In many cases, they can be resolved with a combination of professional help and support from family and friends.

Sometimes young people use alcohol to make themselves feel better. At first, alcohol may seem to help with feelings of sadness, anxiety or stress. However, long-term drinking soon makes these feelings worse. This is because long-term alcohol misuse actually causes depression, and makes it harder to cope with problems.

Signs that someone is experiencing anxiety, depression or problems with alcohol

The person seems to be:

- ♦ tired and run down
- ♦ sad and hopeless
- ♦ irritable much of the time
- ♦ not wanting to do anything
- ♦ confused and unsure about what is happening to them
- ♦ worried and anxious much of the time
- ♦ withdrawing from normal activities
- ♦ avoiding situations that may cause them to feel uncomfortable and anxious
- ♦ drinking too much
- ♦ regularly having more than four drinks on any one occasion
- ♦ drinking to cope with stress, loneliness, anger, or sleeplessness
- ♦ trying to cut down or stop drinking without success

If you said yes to one or more of these, it's a good idea to suggest that the person see a GP for professional assessment.

Who can help?

GPs can help identify how these problems go together and work out simple things to do. The first step is finding a GP the young person feels comfortable with and one who has the necessary skills in this area to help. In recent years, many GPs have done extensive training in mental health care to improve their skills in this area.

Facts about GPs young people should know (and things you can tell them about seeing a GP) –

- ♦ Don't be afraid to look for another GP if you don't feel comfortable with the one you are currently seeing.
- ♦ Some GPs bulk-bill everybody, but some GPs only bulk-bill certain people. Always ask if you're not sure how your visit to the GP is to be paid for.
- ♦ Expect trial and error. Some people with anxiety, depression and alcohol problems have previously received treatment that didn't solve their problems. This doesn't mean treatment can't be sought again from somewhere else. Talk with your GP about these treatments and why they didn't work.
- ♦ There may be times the GP would rather refer to

another GP or a specialist with specific interest and training in anxiety, depression and alcohol. It's important to ask a GP for information about the referral service. You may not feel ready to immediately accept a referral and may need more time to think about it before making a commitment. This is fine. In this situation your GP can schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss the issue at a later time. This time could also be spent in learning more about anxiety, depression and alcohol problems, as well as the treatment options available.

What can family and friends do?

Often, family and friends can play a valuable role in supporting somebody experiencing alcohol, anxiety, and depression problems. The young person can discuss options for involving those people who are closest to them with his or her GP.

Talking about the young person's condition and treatment can help lessen your concerns and the young person's concerns and improve your family's ability to help.

It's important for family and friends to respect any limits the young person might set.

There are support services that can provide information and advice:

- ♦ Lifeline 131 114 (24 hours a day) www.lifeline.org.au
- ♦ Sane Australia 1800 688 382 (9:00am-5:00pm on weekdays) www.sane.org
- ♦ Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (24 hours a day) www.kidshelp.com.au
- ♦ Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre 1800 242 636 (9:00am-5:00pm on weekdays) www.carersaustralia.com.au
- ♦ Alcohol and Drug Information Services 1800 422 599
- ♦ Illawarra Adolescent Mental Health Service 1300 552 289
- ♦ Drug and Alcohol Community Youth Team 4254 1688
- ♦ School counsellors

Some Useful Websites

www.reachout.com.au
www.thesource.gov.au
www.makeanoise.ysp.org.au
www.adf.org.au (Australian Drug Foundation)
www.lawstuff.org.au
www.hereforlife.org.au
www.youth.nsw.gov.au
www.youthoffthestreets.com.au
www.youthservices.wollongong.nsw.gov.au
www.moneystuff.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au
www.kidshelpline.com.au

This is an initiative of the Illawarra Division of General Practice as part of the "Your Mental Health and Alcohol – Managing the Mix" Initiative. Adapted from *Alcohol, Anxiety and Depression - Consumer and Carer Education Resources* (Mental Health Council of Australia (2005))



Social Isolation

Society continues to change in many ways. Over the last generation many things have improved but some things have been lost.

The chances of becoming socially isolated are greater now than earlier and this can adversely affect our health.

We are more mobile, change jobs and addresses more frequently and relate more to people with shared interests, who may live some distance away, than with close neighbours.

Neighbours used to more likely be at home during the day, moved away less often and more frequently included extended family members.

The networking and a sense of wellbeing was contributed to by the local church which was attended by many in the community, small local shops where we were known and the GP who delivered us, knew us and cared for us.

There is good evidence that people who are isolated socially are vulnerable and prone to physical ailments, depression and anxiety, especially if there has been a loss such as bereavement.

What can be done about this?

There are many sporting clubs, special interest groups, service groups, organisations and churches that are pleased to welcome visitors and new members. Perhaps making some

enquiries would be a good step.

Self help and support groups exist for many medical conditions and your GP can be a good source of information as well as being a good support.

Here are some ideas that have been helpful to many people:

- 1 A companion pet can help. Many retirement village residents have enjoyed the 'nursing home dog' when it visits.
- 2 Dust off the Christmas card list. Pleasant surprises generated by connecting with old friends via e-mail, a letter or a phone call during the year can warm others hearts as well as our own.
- 3 "A hug a day keeps the blues away" is a saying many have found to be true.
- 4 Not everyone has someone to hug, but if we get out we can always begin each day with a "bag of ten smiles". If we smile after making brief eye contact, it is hard to empty the bag because most times a smile is returned.

If you feel disheartened, lonely or isolated, may you be encouraged to seek help, reach out, give a little joy and feel a little better.

Dr Les Miller
Local GP

Organ Donation for Transplant?

My brother has severe heart problems and has been waiting for a transplant for more than three years. Procedures other than a transplant operation, such as open-heart surgery, have had limited success. He doesn't lose hope despite a continuing decline in his general condition. My nephew was called at 3am recently and underwent a kidney transplant. Both people were in good health and non-smokers, drinkers, etc before suffering organ failure at comparatively young ages.

These health problems face many families, often involving very young children, and yet Australia continues to have a low rate of participation in organ donation programs.

In several European countries, including France, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Sweden, Norway and Spain there is an "opt-out" policy towards organ donation rather than the "opt-in" policy of countries like Australia and the U.K. The "opt-out" policy presumes consent for organs and tissue to be available for transplant unless a specific objection has been lodged. Such an approach probably affects overall donor rates, eg Belgium has only 3%-4% of the population who opt out of donation.*

Other factors such as the cultural attitudes towards the disposal of bodies or the provision of intensive care beds can also affect rates of participation in organ donation programs.

Currently, Spain has the highest rate in Europe and has shown an increase in participant numbers each year. Its success seems to depend on an additional factor - the establishment of the "Organizacion Nacional de Transplantes (ONT)", a

network of transplant coordinators in 139 intensive care units across the country. ONT professionals identify potential organ donors by closely monitoring emergency departments and tactfully discussing the donation process with families of the deceased.**

Most Australian households recently received a form from the Health Insurance Commission, who administers the Australian Organ Donor Register on behalf of the Federal Government. Return of the completed form allows Australians to consent (or to object) to becoming a donor of organs and/or tissue. Evidence from various surveys over the years, in this and in other western countries, indicates that most people have no objection to donating their organs. However, to make it actually happen in Australia, we each need to do two things:

- 1 Register with the Australian Organ Donor Register.***
- 2 Tell family members about the decision and discuss its implications with them.***

Helen Gapps
Chairperson Community Consultative Committee

Sources:

* Information at www.debatatabase.org/details.asp/topicID=216

** Article from the internet, titled "More countries hope to copy Spain's organ - donation success", written by Mary Helen Spooner, West Essex, UK at www.cmaj.ca/news

*** Information available at www.hic.gov.au Additional information at this site includes bereavement support, provision for anonymous letters and services of remembrance and reflection.

Working Carers Support Gateway

Helping you juggle work and care

People who juggle paid work with caring for a relative or friend in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability are now able to get useful, relevant information and support via a new Internet site.

The 'Working Carers Support Gateway' website www.workingcarers.org.au is now online for New South Wales carers generally, and low-income and isolated carers in particular, who have both caring and workplace responsibilities.

Developed by the Lismore-based Disability and Aged Information Service Inc. (DAISI), the website provides direct information support state-wide for busy working carers. The vision for the Gateway project is that working carers are valued, respected and supported to achieve balance in their work and home life. It has been funded by the Dementia, Carers & Disability Unit of NSW Health.

Who is a working carer?

Working carers are defined as those who do caring work for two or more hours per week and also hold down casual, part-time or full-time paid work, as distinct from 'at-home' carers. They may live with the person they care for, or live separately. Working carers are all ages, from teenagers to people in their 70s. They are men and women, and from diverse backgrounds, and they live all over NSW. They may face geographical isolation from services in a rural or remote area, and they may lack emotional support from friends and family.

Conservative estimates put the number of working carers in NSW at 312,664¹. A working carer may be:

- ♦ a woman in her 60s caring for elderly parents, supporting adult children and grandchildren and working part-time
- ♦ a woman in her 50s caring for an adult child with a disability and working part-time
- ♦ a man caring for his ill partner while working full time
- ♦ a teenager caring for a parent with a mental illness and younger siblings while trying to study and keep a casual job.

Many carers care for more than one person. International research shows that carers, in particular women, are more likely to work part time², earn less than the average wage³,

and that their health is poorer than that of the general population⁴. They want and need to work. Women especially are less likely to leave the workforce to care than they have been in the past, preferring to combine paid work and care⁵. Work is not only an important source of income, but also provides a social outlet and an identity other than 'carer'.

Research by the Gateway team shows that working carers are beset by two interrelated fears: one, that they will falter under the weight of caring; and two, that they will either lose their job or have to give it up because of their caring commitments. The Gateway project will help the working carer identify and access support services in their local area and assist them to maintain their health, finances and sanity.

Given that the number of people who combine paid work and caring is expected to rise, the project is timely. It provides a one-stop-shop of practical information that busy working carers can access via the Gateway website 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The website focuses heavily on industrial relations advocacy and financial planning advice. It contains lists of services for working carers; information - including medical information; fact sheets; advice and links. Working carers are able to subscribe free to a weekly electronic newsletter, join an online discussion group for added support, and contribute stories that reflect on their experiences with employers, services and families.

For further information on the Working Carers Support Gateway project:

Website: www.workingcarers.org.au

E-mail: info@workingcarers.org.au

Address: PO Box 594 Lismore NSW 2480

Ph: 02 6622 8002

REFERENCES

¹ Figure calculated by DAISI based on estimates from the 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Disability, Ageing and Carers Study that there are 748,000 carers in NSW, 76% of whom are of workforce age, but 45% are not in the workforce. This leads to a conservative estimate of 312,664 working carers in NSW.

² The 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Disability, Ageing and Carers Study

³ The 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Disability, Ageing and Carers Study

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Welfare, 2003; NCOSS, Better Social Results for NSW, Submission to the NSW Government for the 2005-2006 State Budget by the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), Sydney, 2004; Carers Australia, Budget Submission 2004-05; Schulz and Beach, 'Caregiving as a risk factor in mortality: the caregiver health effects study', Journal of the American Medical Association, 1999.

⁵ Jenkins, Anne, Rowland, Frieda, Angus, Paula and Hales, Cathy, The Future Supply of Informal Care 2003 to 2013, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 2003.

Illawarra Division of General Practice Community Consultative Committee

Web Site: www.idgp.org.au

E-mail: ccc@idgp.org.au

Your Community Representatives:

Helen Gapps

Nghi Tran

Louise Robinson

Nola Gardner

Patricia Noferi

Kathleen McCorack

Edger du Bois

Tanya Wigg

Postal Address

PO Box 1198
Wollongong NSW 2500

Business Address

Suite 3, Level 1
336 Keira Street
Wollongong NSW 2500
Phone: (02) 4226 7052
Fax: (02) 4226 9485

The Next
Edition of
"House Call"
is Dec 2005.
Information for
inclusion should
be received by
3 Nov 2005.