

House Call



Newsletter of the Community
Consultative Committee of
the IDGP

Volume 7
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January 2006

Call

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of House Call for this year. I hope all our readers will find this issue of House Call interesting and beneficial.

In this issue we have addressed some important issues such as food labelling, macular degeneration and bird flu. We are also pleased to announce the winners of the Illawarra Family Doctor awards for 2005.

Please remember that this newsletter is for you and if you wish to have any items of interest published please contact either the IDGP office or myself and we will endeavour to include this in our newsletter.

Enjoy reading this issue and I would like to extend to our readers all the best for the new year

Edger du Bois
Editor

Label Reading

Don't be fooled by the healthy looking packaging on your food products. It's what's in the food that counts, not how many ticks it looks like it has; not how many nice pictures of fruit and wholegrain cereals or fresh vegetables it has on the colourful label.

We all want to be healthy, so of course manufacturers will try their hardest to make a food look as healthy as they can! They will also just focus on all the potential healthy qualities of that food, no matter how far drawn they are, rather than tell you about the obvious negative qualities.

Red wine for example, which is rich in antioxidants and promoted for heart health; "a glass a day". The fact is that red wine is rich in antioxidants because it is made from berries, and you would actually be much better off to have the fruit each day, save yourself the trauma to the liver and get some extra fibre and nutrition from the fresh fruit!!

As soon as people read that something is "good" for them, it seems to give them the moral passage of right to include it in their eating and often we have the attitude that "more is better".

So often I have clients that include foods like chocolate and alcohol in their daily eating, and have completely justified it to themselves by saying "I read it was good for me!" From who? The chocolate factory? Or the study that the wine company paid for?

We need to take more responsibility for ourselves and our own health. Use your common sense when it comes to what you put in your mouth.

Follow the general principle of "the more processed something is – the less nutrition is left behind and the less healthy it is going to be" and stay tuned to the next edition for label reading tips from your local dietitian.

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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.

Please copy and circulate this newsletter. Thank you.

Winners of the Illawarra Family Doctor Awards 2005

The winners of the Illawarra GP of the Year and Illawarra Practice of the Year awards have been announced!!

This is the second year running for the Illawarra Family Doctor Awards, which are coordinated by the IDGP's Community Consultative Committee.

The Illawarra Family Doctor Awards provide an avenue for local GPs and Practices to be recognised for the outstanding service they provide to our community and reward those who strive for excellence and who make a difference. These awards are a wonderful opportunity for our community to commend general practice and the doctors who work in this field, while at the same time the awards help to raise awareness of the dedication, professional skills and caring approach of GPs in the Illawarra.



Winner of the Illawarra GP of the Year Award for 2005, Dr Robert Sidhwani from Corrimal

The IDGP's Community Committee were overwhelmed with the response from the community with 564 nominations received for Illawarra GP of the Year and 377 nominations for Illawarra Practice of the year. This is truly a testament to the quality and dedication of the GPs and their staff in the Illawarra.

The Community Committee, who assessed the

awards, found the task of selecting the winners very difficult, due to the large number of outstanding nominations that were received. They therefore felt that all the GPs and Practices that were nominated should be commended for the services they provide to their patients.

Due to this number of outstanding nominations, along with the winners, we have also recognised a number of GPs and Practices with exceptional mentions.

And the winners are...

Winner of the Illawarra GP of the Year Award for 2005 is Dr Robert Sidhwani from Corrimal.

GPs with exceptional mentions:

- Dr Sajid Azam from Bellambi
- Dr Chris Chin from Balgownie
- Dr Candy Diep from Keiraville

- Dr Terry Mahon from Warilla
- Dr Dermot Perry from Keiraville
- Dr Jim Turner from Wollongong
- Dr Jack Walton from Wollongong

Winner of the Illawarra Practice of the Year Award for 2005 is Market Street Medical Practice in Wollongong.

Practices with exceptional mentions:

- Bulli Medical Practice
- Keiraville Surgery
- Dr Sumathi Sundar & Dr Vadanam Sundar's Surgery
- Warilla Doctors' Surgery

Congratulations to all the winners and the GPs and Practices that provide an outstanding service to our patients and the community.

Here's what some patients had to say about our winners:

"Dr Robert Sidhwani is what you see is what you get. My ideal doctor straight to the point. Covers all possibilities. He has never misdiagnosed my three children and myself. Even if certain treatment doesn't work he always finds another. My children listen to his words, eg he told my 3 year old 'you must eat fruit and vegies' and now she tells me nearly every meal we have to eat them. He is very genuine and cares for his patients and you always leave with an answer."

Market Street Medical Practice: *"Consistent care and concern above and beyond other medical practices. The genuine and personal care this practice has provided has been exemplary. A true role model on which all medical practices should be based, especially during worrying times, when support and 'plain-English' information is most needed not only by the patient but also the family."*



Winner of the Illawarra Practice of the Year Award for 2005, Market Street Medical Practice in Wollongong

Macular Degeneration

This article has been reproduced with permission from the Teachers Federation Health newsletters "Health Matters", Winter 2005 edition.

Macular Degeneration (MD) is the number one disease in Australia causing severe vision loss. It is a relatively unknown modern health epidemic and affects one in seven Australians over the age of 50 and one in three over 75.

Macular Degeneration is a disease that causes progressive damage to the macula. The macula is the spot in the centre of the retina at the back of the eye which allows us to read, drive and recognise faces. Risk factors for Macular Degeneration can include one or more factors including a family history of MD, people aged over 50 years, smoking or an inadequate diet.

Early detection and prompt treatment is vital to saving your sight. Having regular eye checks should be part of everyone's overall health care program. If there is a family history of MD, have an eye examination regularly from the age of 50 in order to establish whether there are any signs of Macular Degeneration. MD can be detected in its very early stages before any visual symptoms occur, by examination of the retina.

Prompt medical attention should be sought if there is any trouble reading, if straight lines appear wavy or bent, distinguishing faces becomes difficult or if dark or empty patches occur in the vision. Minor symptoms should never be ignored. The earlier MD is detected, the more vision that's likely to be retained.

While many Australians suffer some form of MD, there are ways to reduce the risk of developing the disease including:

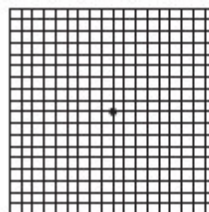
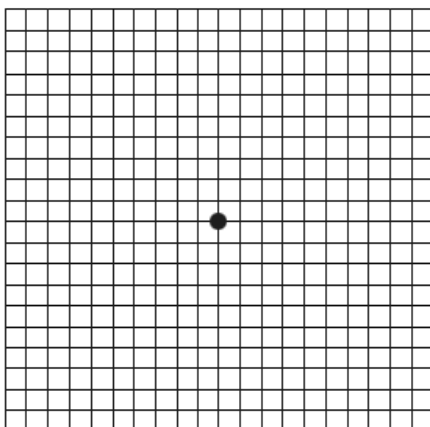
- Having your eyes examined and the macula checked regularly
- Not smoking
- Eating a healthy diet rich in fish, nuts and brightly coloured fruit and vegetables (especially dark leafy green vegetables like spinach)
- Limit your intake of fats
- Exercise regularly and control weight and blood pressure
- In consultation with your doctor, consider taking supplements
- Provide adequate protection for your eyes from sun light exposure, particularly when young

The Amsler Grid eye exam is a simple test that can be used at home, to check for symptoms of MD. However examination by an eye care provider is essential for diagnosis.

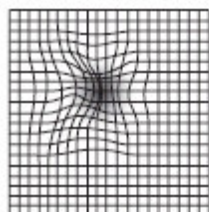
For further information, support or assistance contact the Macular Degeneration Foundation on free call 1800 111 709 or go to www.mdfoundation.com.au The Macular Degeneration Foundation Australia, is a not-for-profit organisation which relies on donations to continue its vital work in awareness, information, education, research and support.

Amsler Grid Eye Exam

This is an Amsler Grid, which can be used to test for symptoms of MD.



Normal vision



Consult your eye doctor immediately

Directions:

1. Do not remove glasses or contacts you normally wear for reading.
2. Stand approximately 35cm from the grid in a well-lit room.
3. Cover one eye with your hand and focus on the centre dot with your uncovered eye. Repeat with the other eye.
4. If you see wavy, broken or distorted lines, or blurred or missing areas of vision you may be displaying symptoms of AMD and should contact your eye care provider immediately.

Do NOT depend on this for any diagnosis

Bird Flu

Following are a few key points about Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) and Avian Influenza A (H5N1) Virus:

What is avian influenza or bird flu?

Bird flu is an infection caused by viruses. These viruses occur naturally in wild birds and usually do not cause them to be ill. However, the viruses can be very contagious so that domesticated birds such as chickens and ducks can become infected, become very sick and die.

Can bird flu viruses infect humans?

Not usually and rarely from person to person. However, there have been some recent cases of human illness in Asia and Europe. Currently, there is worldwide concern about the possibility of widespread human infection (because viruses can often change and spread more easily). The situation is being monitored very closely by all health departments. It is thought that most cases of human infection so far have resulted from contact with infected poultry and contaminated surfaces.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can range from typical flu-like symptoms such as fever, coughing and sore throat and muscles to eye infections, pneumonia and severe breathing problems.

How can humans spread the viruses?

The viruses can be spread by direct or indirect contact, by droplets (eg from coughing and then landing on horizontal surfaces) or by airborne means. Thus, the following sensible precautions and procedures are very important.

What can individuals do?

As with all infectious diseases there are a few sensible precautions that everyone can take. The main ones are:

1. Be careful with personal hygiene, particularly with washing your hands thoroughly after any contact with possible germs. (Make sure you wash the backs of your hands and between each finger, as well as the wrists.)

HAND WASHING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT WAY TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF GERMS.

If water and soap is not available, use alcoholic hand wipes.

- 2. If you have flu-like symptoms:**
 - See your doctor.
 - Avoid public places.
 - Sneeze or cough into disposable tissues (and get rid of these carefully).
 - Maybe wear a mask to avoid spreading infection.
- 3. If you are near someone with flu-like symptoms:**
 - Keep at least one metre back from the person and to the side (particularly if he or she is coughing and sneezing).
 - Clean all surfaces the person may have touched, including door knobs, benches and chair arms. (Use disposable gloves and alcoholic surface wipe if possible.)
 - Avoid public places.
 - Remember that germs can survive for up to a whole day.
- 4. If you are near domestic birds or are preparing poultry for eating be very careful and observe personal hygiene rules.**
- 5. If ever a bird flu epidemic starts make sure you are prepared by being:**
 - informed about the publicised health recommendations (These will be on TV, in newspapers, on the radio, etc.)
 - ready to obey any governmental requests
 - vaccinated

Sources: Internet articles and a CD from the Australian Government, Dept of Health and Ageing, "Prepared and Protected – Infection Control and personal protective Equipment for Respiratory Diseases."



- Helen Gapps

Coming up in March 2006...

DEPRESSION: Don't let it get you down!!

A local community forum on depression – the causes, impacts, strategies and coping skills for people in our community with depression and their carers.

WHEN: Wednesday 1 March 2006
TIME: 4:30pm – 7pm
WHERE: Wesley Hall



Ask Your Community Committee!!

Do you have a question about general practice and how it works? Do you have an issue you'd like to raise about general practice services in the Illawarra? Or would you just like some information on a particular area?

Then why don't you ask your local Community Committee!! You can write, fax, e-mail or phone your question to:

Mail: PO Box 1198, Wollongong NSW 2500
Fax: 4226 9485
E-mail: ccc@idgp.org.au