

DHAC Newsletter

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Highlights in this Issue

- Rural Bush GP leads action for healthier bush communities
- Upcoming HCC Events
- Updates from our Advocacy Corner and Aboriginal Consumer Participation Program
- Special Post-election news on matters of Regional Health by NRHA Inc.
- HCC Membership Info

We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.

~ SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL



Letter from the Editor

Dear DHACs

Welcome to the October Issue of the District Health Advisory Councils (DHAC) e-Newsletter!

In this issue, we bring you:

- ◆ An exciting line up of HCC events, including our Community Forum where you can have your say on the important issue of Oral Health/ Dental Services, held on 9 November;
- ◆ Observations from our Advocacy Corner by our Advocate Bill Fox on the topics of the "Under Use of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in WA" and "Body Shaping"; and
- ◆ Updates from the Aboriginal Consumer Participation Program by Laura Elkin

We would also like to advise of recent additions to our team of staff

- ◆ Heather Taylor, who joined us as Senior Advocate in September; and
- ◆ Myself, Caroline Rugdee, the relief Consumer Participation Programme Coordinator for Cheryl Rugdee who is currently on maternity leave.

Thank you for your continued interest in consumer participation and support of the HCC. We hope you find the information in this issue useful and look forward to working with your DHAC in the near future.

If your DHAC would like to contribute information and articles for the next issue of this e-Newsletter, please send them through to us via email: info@hconc.org.au or by post: Reply Paid, GPO Box C134 Perth WA 6839

Sincerely,
Caroline Rugdee
Relief Community Participation Programme Coordinator

Please circulate this bi-monthly newsletter to those who might be interested.

For an online copy: www.hconc.org.au/ourservices/DHAC.html





Rural GP leads action for healthier bush communities

Tamworth GP Jenny May has been re-elected unopposed to serve as Chair of the National Rural Health Alliance for a third consecutive term. Dr May is currently based in Alice Springs.

"The hung Parliament has placed rural and remote issues well and truly on the political table," said Dr May at the 19th Annual General Meeting, held in Canberra.

"Having met with the three independent MPs, Tony Windsor, Bob Katter and Rob Oakeshott, the Alliance looks forward to continuing to help all sides of politics to address the health issues currently facing one-third of the nation's population," she said.

Other office holders elected include Dalby-based Dr Kathryn Kirkpatrick as Deputy Chair,; Pauline Wardle from Alice Springs, as Treasurer; and Gordon Stacey from the WA Country Health Service as Secretary.

Also elected to the Board are Dubbo-based remote area nurse Sophie Heathcote; occupational therapist Nicole O'Reilly from Darwin; Alice Springs dentist Bruce Simmons; Echuca chiropractor Matt McLindon; Heather Wieland from Gladstone; and Robert Williams from the Australian Council of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, based in Sydney.

"In what is shaping up as an extremely important year for rural health, I am genuinely delighted to have the support of such a vigorous and dedicated team," Dr May said.

Council also voted to admit two new member groups: The Rural and Remote Special Interest Group of the Australian College of Ambulance Professionals, and the Rural Optometry Group of the Optometrists Association of Australia. Their inclusion takes Alliance membership to 31 national bodies.

Jenny May welcomed the Alliance's two newest members and expressed confidence that their involvement would further strengthen the Alliance in its work to secure equal health for people in country areas. For fuller particulars visit the website at www.ruralhealth.org.au

HCC Events for 2010!



Health Issues Group
Thursday 7 October



Consumer Representative
Network Meeting
Tuesday 12 October



CAC Chairs Roundtable
(Topic: Patient Safety)
Friday 8 October



Consumer Representative
Skills Training
Saturday 23 October



Consumer Activism
Workshop
Monday 25 October



Health Issues Group
Thursday 4 November



HCC Community Forum
on Oral Health/ Dental
Services
Tuesday 9 November



Consumer Representative
Network Meeting
Thursday 25 November



CAC Chairs Roundtable
Meeting
Friday 26 November

Contact Health
Consumers' Council on
9221 3422 or email
info@hconc.org.au to
register or for more details
about any of these events!

Advocacy Corner – Observations from Bill Fox, HCC Advocate



I have been asked to pen a few words on any health related subject I choose. With the deadline being tomorrow I've decided to make a couple of general observations from our advocacy of recent times.

a) Under Use of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in WA.

If there is an issue of the month it relates to the inability of those with limited means to access necessary dental care where the need is more complex. Complaints coming in to this office strongly suggest that severe dental deterioration goes hand in hand with a broad range of physical ailments as well as reduced self esteem/ mental health.

While there are State run, State subsidised or State contracted services out there, they do not necessarily meet all needs – particularly where the problems are complex and/ or when time and distance are issues. In many complex circumstances the services remain too expensive even with a 50% reduction in cost to those with Health Care Cards.

The Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme provides, potentially, \$4,250 worth of dental care over two years from the private sector for those with chronic medical conditions and complex care needs. The GP is pivotal in developing an "Enhanced Primary Care Plan" in conjunction.

b) I had a routine endoscopy not so long ago. What grabbed my attention while I sat in the surgeon's waiting room was the stream of slightly obese 20 to 40 year old women seeking lap band surgery and the like. I don't know how many of these people actually proceeded through to surgery but it did raise the possibility for me that lap banding could be being sought primarily for cosmetic rather than health reasons.

A couple of days ago a local plastic surgeon's web page was drawn to my attention. On offer are breast reshaping, tummy tucks, thigh reductions, calf implants, body lifts and suchlike - alongside non surgical complementary rejuvenating treatments. These are spoken of as "Lifestyle Packages" - they include a "Post Pregnancy Pamper Package", a "Beautiful Bride Package" and a "Skin Turnaround Birthday Celebration Package".

We at the Health Consumer's Council are seeing, in increasing numbers, people whose attempt to achieve a new body shape has gone horribly wrong. In some instances the surgery has not met their expectations and they can no longer bear to see themselves in the mirror. Words such as "permanent discomfort", "tightness", "numbness", and "scarring" are common. Some fear returning to the surgeon who performed the initial operation for lack of trust or having worn out their welcome.

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For those unfortunate enough to be in these circumstances, they will often find that other surgeons are not too keen on correcting the "mistakes" of their fellows. If they do, it will be expensive and without guarantee of achieving the success initially sought. We have recently become aware of one provider who has made a number of "errors" – and we are increasingly referring unhappy patients on to medical negligence lawyers for advice and follow up.

As advocates with the Health Consumers' Council, our advice on the matter of cosmetic surgery is to (please) only seek it where it is a clinical/ psychological necessity and, if for any reason you do go ahead with it, to fully understand the implications of what you are doing beforehand. This should include seeking second opinions and thoroughly researching the bona fides of the provider beforehand.

Update from Laura Elkin's on the Aboriginal Consumer Participation Program

The Aboriginal Consumer Participation Program - gave a presentation at the Combined CAC and DHAC annual conference in July, highlighting issues Aboriginal consumers have raised with us over the past 3.5 years. These concerns have been raised by both metropolitan and country based consumers and include: difficulty accessing GP's; difficulty accessing PATS especially Interpreters and Escorts; Discrimination and inappropriate assumptions; difficulty accessing mental health and support counsellors; barriers to lodging complaints; not knowing who to approach for help at the service; difficulty accessing transport and accommodation in Perth and regional centres when having to travel for services. For further info please contact laura.elkin@hconc.org.au or (08) 9221 3422.

We recommend health services develop local Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) with Aboriginal consumers to identify local concerns and work together on developing strategies. RAPs were developed and are supported by Reconciliation Australia, who already have over one hundred RAPs on their website from schools, universities, government departments, businesses and community groups. The Office of Aboriginal Health; the Child & Adolescent Health Service and the metropolitan area health services have RAPs and are now developing them at the local hospital level. The most important part of the RAP is bringing consumers and services to work together on improving health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

We welcome William Trott to the program, who began working with us in August.

Health Consumers' Council provides an Advocacy Service to both metropolitan and country consumers in Western Australia. This service can assist consumers in accessing health services to meet your needs, as well as assist you in making a complaint.

Ring 9221 3422 or Toll Free (country): 1800 620 780, or email info@hconc.org.au for further information or to arrange for a consumer advocate for further assistance.

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Special post-election e-news from NHRA Inc.

Regional affairs are in the political and media spotlight as perhaps never before.

Since the formation of the new Gillard Government, much of the focus has been on the \$9.9 billion package for regional areas. A substantial amount of this money is not new but what we have is a very welcome guarantee that the 32% who live and work in rural areas will get their fair share.

In the medium term, the Parliamentary and public service infrastructure built into the commitment secured by Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott may be more valuable than the immediate guaranteed funding. There is to be a Cabinet Minister and sub-committee, a Parliamentary committee, an agency to provide advice to the public and a think tank all devoted to regional Australia. As well, there will be a coordinating unit in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and a strengthening of both Regional Development Australia and the Office of Northern Australia.

There has to be a real chance that a strong and fair set of policies and accountabilities for rural, regional and remote areas can be developed over the next few years. Just where 'regional' begins and ends is an important matter for later, but the Alliance will be working to ensure that it includes 'remote' and 'rural'.

Many thanks to the members of the NRHA Council who took the time out of their busy lives to spend 5 days away from home for our face-to-face meeting – held at a most propitious time!

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Useful Links

Check these links out for further services and assistance to your needs

Department of Health - Country Hospital Info

<http://www.health.wa.gov.au/emergencyactivity/beds/countryhealth.cfm>

WA Country Health Service

<http://wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/>

Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia

<http://hcrra.ruralhealth.org.au>

National Rural Health Alliance Inc.

<http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/>

The Australian Government now uses the five-point Geographical Classification-Remoteness Areas system to classify rurality.

To check the rurality of your home or another location go to:

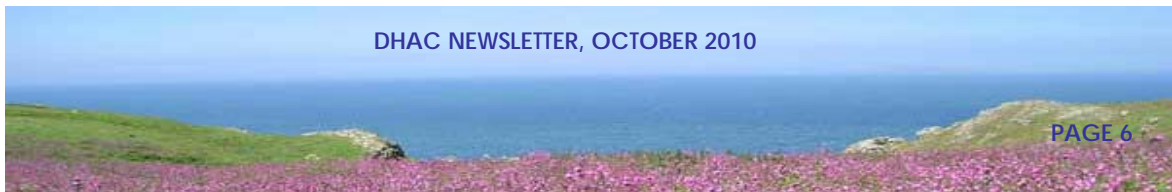
<http://www.doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/Publishing.nsf/Content/RA-locator>

Over 300 abstracts received for 11th National Rural Health Conference

Over 300 abstracts have been received for 11th National Rural Health Conference to be held in Perth, 13-16 March 2011.

Planning is in train to review the abstracts and develop another exciting and stimulating program from those abstracts selected.

The program will be available on the website in October. Early bird registrations are open until 18 December 2010 and bookings are being taken for exhibition booths. Contact the Conference team on 02 6285 4660 or conference@ruralhealth.org.au



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NRHA meeting with the three country Independants

It didn't take long at all for the media to consider the possibility that a focus on regional areas would take attention and – Heaven forbid – resources away from metropolitan areas. In the Windsor-Oakeshott media conference, one of the first questions was about whether a uniform wholesale price for broadband would mean city people would be paying more than might otherwise be the case.

Not only was this failure to uphold the principle of a fair go for all Australians galling in the extreme, it also was curious.

There have always been cross-subsidies in telecommunications between the 'Golden Triangle' in the South East and the rest of Australia. People in country areas may well believe that the Community Service Obligation and the Customer Service Guarantee in telecommunications have never done enough to provide them with equivalent access - but none of them would argue against the principle they involve - and nor should city people!

Rather than buying into this sort of 'old paradigm' (see how modern we are?), the Alliance decided to tackle the principle of a fair go for all Australians head on and objectively. Have a look at the Alliance five-page summary of rural-metropolitan inequities and tell us what you think (to carol@ruralhealth.org.au). Maybe you can use some of this information in your local area or media outlets to keep the momentum going for some real change. Rural and remote areas need a hand up, not a hand out, and a voice from every corner will help!

Gordon Gregory - www.ruralhealth.org.au

Health Consumers' Council Membership – Join now!

The Health Consumers' Council would like to encourage you to become a member. There are many benefits to becoming a member, besides the fact that it is totally free!

As a member of the Health Consumers' Council you will:

- Be kept up to date about health issues
- Be able to have your say on health policy and on the way that health services are delivered
- Receive free *Health Matters* magazines
- Be able to go on our distribution list so you can find out about all the events involving HCC and other consumers!

OUR VISION

To be an independent, authoritative and effective voice of and for health consumers in Western Australia

If you would like to become a member, please call Caroline Rugdee on (08) 9221 3422 or Free Call 1800 620 780 and we'll help you out!

The Health Consumers Council also has a website: www.hconcc.org.au

Visit the website to find up to date health issues, relevant links and information!