



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTANT PHYSICIANS

PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

November 2009

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From the President

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support and suggestions, the AACCP council members and the Secretariat for their enthusiasm, hard work and support over the past four years. The AACCP is very active and is a leading proponent for consultant physician and paediatrician (CPP) issues in relation to remuneration and workforce.

During my time as President I have seen the AACCP grow into a key organisation for all CPPs. I had the privilege of being President of the AACCP for the introduction of items 132 and 133, which was a major victory for all CPPs. These items recognised CPPs important role in the care of patients with chronic and complex conditions in all age groups. Australians are living longer, but for many, they live with a number of medical conditions that require effective management. This is the crucial role of CPPs to set the standards in treatment of acute conditions and the management, with the patient's GP, of chronic conditions.

Equally, paediatricians have an

increasingly significant role in the treatment and management of acute and chronic conditions with children, not only surviving, but enjoying quality of life into adulthood. It is our paediatricians who have brought a higher standard of care to support patients and their families.

I encourage all members to continue to support the AACCP as the future holds many challenges with recent reviews of the Australian healthcare system focussing on primary care, to the exclusion of specialist medicine's contribution to ambulatory and community care. Please encourage your peers and colleagues to join the AACCP, to ensure a vibrant, viable and well resourced organisation, which will be able to provide guidance and support into the future, and actively approach the multiple impending challenges.

Dr Bill Heddle, SA, Cardiologist, is the AACCP President-Elect and I am sure he will provide exemplary leadership for the AACCP into the future.

Les Bolitho, FRACP
AACCP President

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President-Elect

The AACCP is very concerned over the lack of recognition of the important roles of consultant physicians and paediatricians (CPPs) in health care. Despite our submission, and those of other organisations such as the RACP, the lack of reference to CPPs in the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) report, the Preventative Health Care Taskforce report, and other recent Government reports, puts a question mark over the feasibility of implementing the recommendations.

The AACCP will continue to put the CPP case to politicians to stress the importance of all Australians having appropriate access to CPPs. It is ironic that the same Government that stresses the importance of the National Health Priorities such as child health, chronic disease management, diabetes mellitus, arthritis, and cardiovascular disease, has been ignoring the CPPs who are the very health professionals who can provide the

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President-Elect

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leadership in care to manage these priorities. The AACP will be lobbying strongly to correct this oversight by the nation's "leaders" in Health Care Reform.

Personally, I would like to welcome **Dr Paul Bauert**, Paediatrician, to the Council of the AACP. Paul brings a wealth of clinical experience and the knowledge of working for better health care for young Australians, both indigenous and non-indigenous. It is noted that over the last 20 years the infant mortality of indigenous Australians has fallen exponentially, likely due to improved health care as a result of the efforts of paediatricians such as Paul. However, this improvement is no longer occurring and the "gap" in infant mortality between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians remains unacceptable.

A brief word about our retiring President, **Dr Les Bolitho**; not only all AACP members but all Australians, and all CPPs owe Les a debt of gratitude for his diligent and effective labours on their behalf for the last four years. He has led a rejuvenation of the AACP, with a significant gain for our patients in support (by the previous Government) for prolonged consultation with Items 132 and 133. I am sure I speak for all members in wishing him all the best for the future, and our heartfelt thanks for his leadership and a job well done.

As can be seen from the comments above, there remains much to be done, and my desire is that with the help of our well informed, enthusiastic, and dedicated Council of the AACP, and most particularly with the ongoing support of our members, that we will be able to continue pursuing our goals of support for all CPPs, so they can more effectively deliver a high standard of vital health care to the Australian population.

William Heddle MD, FRACP, FCSANZ, FAMA
Vice President and President Elect,
AACP

Department of Health & Ageing

Medical Climate Change

The release of the NHHRC (National Hospital and Health Reform Commission - www.nhhrc.org.au) and NPHCS (National Primary Health Care Strategy - www.yourhealth.gov) reports have indicated there are changes expected in the medical climate within the Australian health care scene.

However, there has been little mention or focus on the role of CPPs or "Specialists" in these papers. Scant reference to public health issues, geriatric patients and palliative care services does not provide recognition of the role of consultant physicians and paediatricians in Australian health care – either in hospitals or ambulatory care medicine.

The role of general practitioners in preventative and primary health care is the focus of the current papers. However, with the increasing complexity of patient care and the management of patients with chronic diseases, along with the ageing spectrum of patients, there is a continuing need to emphasise the role and importance of collaborative care with specialist paediatricians and physicians.

The AACP will continue to represent the interest of our members during the consultative processes undertaken by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd and the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Nicola Roxon

Medicare Issues

The timing and interpretation of MBS Items 132/133

There has been some concern from members as to the correct process for using items 132 and 133. It appears that some members have had their claims rejected by Medicare.

The AACP sought advice from the DoHA and have received the following statement:

"Item 132 can be billed once, and 133 can be claimed twice within a twelve month period. The twelve-month period commences from the date of the initial consult under item 132, and both of the 133s must be claimed within 12 months from the date item 132 was claimed. The frequency restrictions are considered to be rolling restrictions and not based on calendar or financial years. Medicare Australia has confirmed that their system is set up to allow only one claim per patient per provider of item 132 in a twelve-month period and two 133s within the same period."

The AACP hopes this clarifies the usage of these items for our members. If any member has followed this process and their claim was rejected, please email the Secretariat with details of your specific situation, so that we can further investigate any anomalies with the DoHA.

Ongoing Matters with DoHA

The AACP is actively engaged in ongoing discussion with the DoHA representatives on issue relating to;

- the need for **prolonged consultation and review items** for complex patients with chronic diseases requiring coordination and management,
- the anomaly whereby patients are not eligible for MBS **reimbursement for Allied Health**

services following attendance for consultation and review MBS Items 132/133 (although eligible after MBS Items 110/116).

There has been considerable interest in the development of items for **Telemedicine**, with the ongoing development of a further discussion paper to be circulated in the near future.

Council

Welcome and Congratulations to **Dr Paul Bauert**, Paediatrician from Darwin, NT who has joined the AACCP Council as a Director.

Paul has extensive experience in clinical practice and in the medico-political scene, is a current Federal AMA Council member and a long time AACCP member.

We look forward to Paul's input on the many issues the AACCP focuses on for consultant physicians and paediatricians.

Annual General Meeting

The Australian Association of Consultant Physicians' 2009 Annual General Meeting will be held at 6.30pm Thursday, 26th November 2009 at the AACCP Office;

Suite 2,
780 Darling St,
Rozelle, NSW.

All members are invited to attend the AGM. Notices have been sent out to members by email and post.

This is a significant AGM, with **Dr Bill Heddle** taking over the

Presidency. The AACCP has been driven for the last four years by **Dr Les Bolitho's** passion and enthusiasm for greater recognition of CPPs. He has actively participated in discussions and negotiations with the Australian Government, and has been a great promoter of the AACCP, as you well know. The AACCP thanks Les for his hard work and welcomes Bill as incoming President.

Website Upgrade

The AACCP website upgrade is nearing completion, and we hope to have it ready for members before the end of the year.

Expanding the website is a reflection of the growth of the AACCP and the direction of the organisation. We hope members find it a valuable source of information as well as a member benefit.

Please show your support by visiting the website!



www.consultantphysicians.com.au

Membership

The AACCP is introducing its official **Member-Get-A-Member program** in time for new 2010 membership applications.

There will now be a reward system for members who recruit new members to join the AACCP. For each new member that joins the AACCP - with your name written as the referring member on their application form - you will receive \$50 off your *next years* membership fees. Sign up four members within the membership year, and your next years fee will be free!

We hope our members will embrace the spirit of this program and encourage your colleagues to join the AACCP.

Full details will be available on the membership section of the upgraded AACCP website. **Happy recruiting!**

Conferences

WCIM2010 & Sunrise Session



The AACCP will be an exhibitor at next years World Congress of Internal Medicine 2010, to be held in Melbourne on 20-25 March.

During the conference the AACCP will be holding a Sunrise Session on Tuesday, 23 March 2010 at 7:45am - 8:45am, on the topics of Telemedicine and eHealth.

The AACCP is pleased to announce the three guest speakers for the session;

- **Prof Michael Georgeff** of Monash University,
- **A/Prof Graeme Hart** of Austin Health,
- **Prof John Wilson** of The Alfred.

Full details will be provided closer to the conference.

WCIM2010 Cardiac Session

Council members, **A/Prof Gerard Carroll** and **Dr Bill Heddle** will be presenting at the Cardiac session "*Cardiology for the Rural/Remote Physician*", which will be chaired by **Dr Les Bolitho**, on Wednesday, 24 March 2010 at 7:45am-8:45am.

Australia & New Zealand Medical & Surgical Gastrointestinal Week

The AACCP attended Gastrointestinal Week on 21-24 October 2009, held at the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre.

A complimentary stand was provided by the Gastroenterological Society of Australia. We thank them for their generosity in assisting the AACCP to promote our role as an advocate for all CPPs.