



# AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTANT PHYSICIANS

## PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

March 2010

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### From the President

Welcome to our Consultant Physician and Paediatrician (CPP) members.

The medico-political scene has been very busy in recent weeks particularly with the Federal Government's announcements on the proposed changes to hospital funding. Important events to note include:

#### Reports in 2009 related to Health Reform

- National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) Report
- Primary Health Care Strategy (NPHCS)
- National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)
- E-Health Reform with reports from National E-Health Transitional Authority

Despite the Prime Minister's recent participation in the Opening Session of the WCIM in Melbourne, the recent announcements about changes to hospital funding have focussed on hospitals and GPs, with little attention to the critical roles of CPPs in both hospital and ambulatory (including "primary") health care settings. The AACCP invited the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, as well as the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Health Minister to visit a CPP at work. We hope the PM and the Minister see the value of spending this time with a CP or paediatrician, just as they have spent time with GPs in their practices. To date, we have an enthusiastic "yes" from the Opposition Leader, as well as the Shadow Health Minister.

#### Legislation in process in 2010

- Health Care Identifiers Bill 2010
- Health Practitioners Regulation (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010 State Government enabling legislation for NRAS
- Senate Community Affairs Committee

report on inquiry into Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010

The AACCP found details of proposed structural support for enhanced specialist training lacking. The AACCP will continue to emphasise the importance of E-consultation and obtaining Government support for this.

#### Federal Government Announcements

- National Health and Hospitals Network (NHHN)
- Medical training changes (15 March 2010)
  - ⇒ Doubling of GP training places
  - ⇒ Doubling places for Junior Doctors to experience General Practice
  - ⇒ More than doubling the current number of places available for medical graduates to undertake training to become specialist doctors in private, community, and rural settings from 360 to 900 by 2014.

The detail of these proposals is yet to be seen, and NHHN and the last have potential impact on CPPs. There is a concern that funding for this program (\$632m) is coming from other program areas, and it is not clear what programs will be cut back or lose funding to support the medical training changes.

Nevertheless, it is important that CPPs take an active role as clinicians in clinical governance and administration as envisaged in the NHHN plan. The AACCP will pursue financial support for CPPs for the e-health reform.

During 2010 the AACCP will continue lobbying for patients to be able to receive Medicare benefits when referred direct by CPPs to allied health providers as well as obtaining a "very long" consultation item, particularly (but not only) for paediatrics.

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## Spend a day with a Consultant Physician

The AACP continues to pursue its invitations to both the Prime Minister and Minister for Health and Ageing to spend some time in the practice of a consultant physician or paediatrician. The Government has shown a great deal of interest in GPs with their much-publicised "day with a GP", yet appear to show little interest in specialists - who play a significant role in both the hospital and non-hospital sectors. Further discussions will need to take place to gain a positive response to our invitation.

Our aim is to have them fully understand the role consultant physicians and paediatricians play within the "primary health care" (that is, the non-hospital) sector. The increasing complexity of health conditions puts enormous demand on your services, yet the Government remains ignorant of the extent of your role; a worrying fact when it comes to them making changes to the health system. The AACP runs an ongoing "education program" about the role of CPPs.

We were pleased to receive some recent media coverage specifically as a result of our media campaign to improve understanding of the role of CPPs. This helps politicians, bureaucrats and the community better understand just how much of the health of the community we take care of - from the newly born, to the frail aged.

### AACP Submission

#### Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee

The AACP made a submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010.

Our main concerns are patient privacy, expansion of the uses of the personal data that will be held under this scheme and the provision of adequate resources to all medical providers for upgrading their systems to accommodate this significant move to e-health. Note that health care providers will be issued with new "unique identifiers" under this scheme, just as all Medicare card holders will be issued with new numbers.

Download a copy of the submission from our website at [www.consultantphysicians.com.au](http://www.consultantphysicians.com.au).

### MBS Quality Framework

The MBS Quality Framework that came in on 1 January 2010 has changed the system of including new Medicare items, introduced a more formal evaluation process for time-limited items (the old Section 3c items and the new time-limited items under the Quality Framework) and established monitoring and review of existing items.

There are to be three committees associated with the MBS Quality Framework process:

- (i) New Listing Advisory Committee
- (ii) Existing Items Reviews Advisory Committee, and
- (iii) Pricing Methodology Advisory Committee.

The New Listing Advisory Committee will have consultant physician representation and the AACP hopes to have an opportunity to have input to this committee.

The MBS Quality Framework is aligned with two other major reviews:

- (i) *Review of Health Technology Assessment (HTA Review)* that examined the MSAC and TGA processes, and

- (ii) *Reviews of Diagnostic Imaging and Pathology.*

The HTA Review report was recently released. The DI and Pathology reviews are currently underway and are due to report later this year. While these reviews are directly relevant to some of our members (e.g. nuclear medicine physicians and cardiologists), resultant changes, e.g. which affect access to diagnostic tests and their cost to patients, are of importance to all CPPs.

Therefore, we will be closely monitoring these reviews and when relevant, making submissions or seeking input to consideration of

## WCIM 2010

The AACP had a successful exhibition at WCIM 2010, raising awareness of the AACP. During the conference we signed up a number of new members and had members renew their membership – thank you for your support. It was encouraging to receive feedback that CPPs realise the importance of an organisation that solely looks after their interests and

promotes understanding of the role of CPPs.

We are still finding that some CPPs haven't heard of the AACP or they do not realise that the AACP is the organisation responsible for them being able to use items 132 and 133.

Overall we received a good response and hope that the many

CPPs that took information away will support you in joining the AACP. Every new member is significant in increasing our influence with Government and supporting activities such as education and training and improved access to CPP services.

## Australia Day Honours

Congratulations to our Immediate Past President and Council member, **Dr Les Bolitho AM**, who was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia award. This is a well-deserved acknowledgement of his services to medicine both as a clinician and an educator.

Two AACP members were also awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, for their outstanding service to medicine:

**Dr Joseph Canalese OAM**, and

**Dr John Fuller OAM** –

Congratulations to you both.

## Membership & Communication

**RENEWALS:** THANK YOU to the many members who have already renewed for 2010. Reminder notices will be sent out after the Easter break to members who haven't yet renewed. In the meantime you may renew online or request a replacement invoice from the Secretariat.

**BPAY:** The introduction of BPAY has proved a success, with many members taking advantage of this easy to use payment facility. We are pleased to have improved the renewal process for members.

**CARDIOLOGISTS:** The AACP recently wrote to cardiologists who aren't current members of the AACP, inviting them to join up. Please support our efforts and encourage all consultant physicians and

paediatricians to join. The AACP is in a powerful position of representing your profession as a whole.

Strengthen our influence by helping increase our membership.

**EMAIL:** The AACP is now using an email marketing service to facilitate keeping in touch with our members. Email is our preferred communication method as it is a faster means of reaching members and a better use of resources. It will not only improve communication with members, but also with non-members. Please ensure you advise the AACP if your email address changes.

**WEBSITE:** The AACP's upgraded website "went live" on 18 January. The purpose of the upgrade is to provide members with an up-to-date

central information source covering workforce and economic matters relating to all consultant physicians and paediatricians. It will also be updated with any actions the AACP takes on your behalf. Please utilise the [website](#) as it will be updated regularly.