

Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Aged Care

The Wide Bay Division is pleased to provide the following submission to the Senate Committee in relation to item (d) of the Terms of Reference:

The adequacy of Home and Community Care programs in meeting the current and projected needs of the elderly

The division works with 170 local General Practitioners and their staff to improve the health of the community. The Division is responsible for 14 local government areas across the Wide Bay AND Burnett including Hervey Bay, Bundaberg and Maryborough. This includes a population of around 170, 000 people.

The Wide Bay has an average 65+ population of 17%, with some areas having over double the Queensland average (e.g. Hervey Bay has nearly 22%) and a low SEIFA index. The area is one of the fastest growing areas in Queensland (Hervey Bay experienced a 56% increase in population between 1991 and 2001) and much of this increase has been from 'Sea Change' retirees who often lack local family and social supports.

In recognition of the high number of ageing people in the area, the WBDGP has an Aged Care Program that aims to, in collaboration with other aged care service organisations, provide services and support to help GPs maintain independence and optimise health outcomes for elderly patients.

Access to HACC packages as an alternative to low-level residential aged care is an important aspect of keeping our ageing population independent and in the community. However, our extensive consultations and liaison with HACC and other health service providers indicates that the existing HACC program fails to meet the needs of a significant demographic – the elderly patient who has an acute incident (e.g. minor stroke, fall) and because of lack of access to immediate intensive support (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, acute nursing) has deteriorating health, decreased mobility and increased dependence. These patients are often unnecessarily admitted to, or kept in hospital, risk never retaining their former level of health and independence and may be left with no option but to wait for a bed in a Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF).

The Division has received significant local support for the concept of an Emergency Response Team. This is a concept based on the UK model of immediate (within 48 hours of incident) short-term (e.g. eight weeks) intensive interventions by appropriate allied health and nursing professionals aimed at securing the patients independence, safety and health and preventing the debilitating impacts associated with long hospital stays and lengthy delays for concentrated rehabilitative health services. In Ealing, UK, in the

first year of the Emergency Response Team's operation net savings of approx Aus\$1.6 million were made in the cost of HACC-type services alone.¹

This is a model of care that aligns well with the actions prioritised in the recent Joint Communique from the Australian Health Minister's Conference:

*'Introduce interventions in 2004 that target the specific care needs of older people at the point of access to the hospital to prevent avoidable hospital admissions'*²

It also accords with the Australian Government's intention to:

*'develop administrative arrangements that would support the allocation of HACC funds across a three-tiered community care system, based on different levels of care and support.'*³

The Division's Aged Care Program Manager (Ms Natalie Sell) has been awarded a Churchill Scholarship to further investigate this model of care with Dr Iain Carpenter from the Kent University. Ms Sell's research will be completed towards the end of 2004 and it is the Division's intention to use this research and our local knowledge to apply for HACC Innovation Pool funds when the funding round is announced later in the year.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or Ms Natalie Sell to further discuss this submission.



Rona Thomas
Executive Officer
Wide Bay Division of General Practice

¹ Ealing Evaluation Report – Year 1

² Joint Communique, Australian Health Ministers' Conference, 29 July 2004

³ A New Strategy for Community Care, The Way Forward, Dept of Health and Ageing, 2004