



Primary Mental Health Care Forum

Report and Recommendations

Consultation document



On the Friday 26th November 2004 the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners together with General Practice Divisions Victoria hosted a Primary Mental Health Care Forum. Over 120 people, including mental health professionals and more than 40 general practitioners from around Victoria attended this event.

The theme of the forum was State engagement with general practice and building relationships across the specialist and primary care sectors in mental health. The event interestingly coincided with the publication of the draft report from the Productivity Commission, calling for better co-ordination in health care from both Commonwealth and State governments. The day recognised the role of general practice in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with mental health conditions and the services currently being delivered under existing initiatives, such as the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care initiative and the state-funded Primary Mental Health Teams.

Dr Grace Groom, CEO, Mental Health Council of Australia provided the keynote address for the forum. In her presentation Dr Groom posed the question – ‘Is Victoria in the front line in the battle against mental health?’ Her presentation explored the challenges facing primary care, identifying through community consultation that the mental health system frequently fails consumers and morale in the service is low. While Dr Groom concluded that Victoria is still leading the way both nationally and internationally in its approach to mental health care she believed that without changes this would not be the case for long. The reason she attributed for this was a reduction in funding at a time when demand for services was growing. Dr Groom recommended that an integrated approach across mental health services is required as the impact of mental illness requires responses from all sectors. In conclusion Dr Groom recommended that Victoria needs to continue to support its clinical leaders and their centres of excellence and to urgently address the disproportionately low allocation of funding to mental health services.

The three sessions that followed saw presentations reviewing successful primary mental health care initiatives in Victoria within the areas of adult, infant, child and adolescent mental health as well as a session exploring the relationship between general practice and psychiatry. Each of these presentations are available on the GPDV website at www.gpdv.org.au

The final session of the day again looked more broadly at the current structures in place for the primary mental health sector through the Department of Human Services, the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative and Beyond Blue. The issues that were highlighted included:

- how effective the current Three Step Plan was proving to be through the Better Outcomes initiative
- the availability and value of GP time for mental health
- personal and professional support for GPs in delivering mental health services
- encouraging GP engagement in mental health initiatives
- access to allied health services in rural areas
- the need for improved communication between mental health professionals and GPs (both ways)
- promoting continuity of care.
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A series of recommendations have been drafted from the forum and have been forwarded to state and federal governments..



RECOMMENDATIONS PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH CARE FORUM 26 November 2004



The Issue:

There are pressing issues related to integration and co-ordination of mental health services across primary care and specialist sectors for all patients in Victoria:

Over-arching Recommendation

That the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the States and Territories, develop a **Primary Mental Health Care Policy** to:

- articulate the directions of the Third National Mental Health Plan, and
- identify the areas where joint funding, identified patient health outcomes and agreed performance measures can be applied.

Adult Mental Health Services and Community Health Counselling Session

The Issue:

For adult patients, there is a need for increased support to general practice to enable continuity of care for patients with enduring and complex mental health conditions.

Commonwealth Level

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government:

- Adequately resource general practitioners at the practice level, through mental-health trained Practice Nurse or equivalents, to assist support active interventions for patients, including liaison and communication with specialist services and relevant local community services, such as Drug and Alcohol agencies, for improved care planning and patient management.
- Continue to support general practice access secondary consultation from psychiatrists and mental health professionals for care of adult patients.

State Level

It is recommended that the State Mental Health Branch:

- resource and develop an improved system of discharge planning and shared care arrangements for patients with mental illnesses who attend inpatient units and community mental health services that recognises the role of general practice and primary care agencies. These primary care agencies specifically include the Psychiatric Disability Support Services, Drug and Alcohol services, and Community Health Counselling services.

Commonwealth and State Level

That both levels of government invest in joint planning and funding for integrated mental health services across primary and specialist sectors in areas where an integrated funding stream and service best meets local needs.

Infant, Child and Adolescent Services Session

The Issues:

- 1) General Practice needs additional support to respond appropriately to the needs of families, infants, children and adolescents in the *context* of primary care services at the local level.
- 2) There is a need for local level co-ordination and communication between general practice, specialist services, schools, and relevant primary care agencies.

Commonwealth Level

It is recommended that the Commonwealth fund:

- Divisions of General Practice to explore “Family Centred Care” models of practice as part of their Continuing Professional Development program for general practitioners;
- Divisions of General Practice to liaise with local primary care networks, specialist infant services, and CAMHS services to further develop referral pathways for these patients groups;
- Practice level support, through a mental health-trained Practice Nurse, to ensure communication/liasion with specialist services and primary care agencies for mother/baby, child and adolescent patients accessing general practice;
- Training for general practitioners to enhance detection, diagnosis and management of mental health disorders and problems experienced by younger patients;
- GP peer support measures to ensure ongoing learning and clinical support.

Division level

It is recommended that:

- General Practitioners are encouraged to identify their interest in working with these patient groups to CAMHS, schools and related agencies, and active measures be taken to develop links between GPs and CAMHS.

State Level

It is recognised that CAMHS require additional funding to engage in primary care liaison, and it is therefore recommended that the State Mental Health Branch resource:

- CAMHS services to support liaison with general practice to improve communication/discharge planning processes and to promote secondary consultation to general practice.
- consult with general practice concerning improved linkage with CAMHS and related services.

Psychiatry Interface with General Practice Session

The Issue

The communication between general practice and psychiatrists, both public and private, needs substantial improvement.

Commonwealth Level

It is recommended that:

- the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and general practice organisations, continue to explore and further resource practical measures to improve communication between GPs and private psychiatrists;
- the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, fund access to ongoing psychiatric advice for the care of patients with complex conditions who are treated in general practice when other options are not available;
- The Commonwealth consider introducing a specific Health Assessment Item under the MBS for patients discharged from specialist services to the care of GPs.

Division Level

It is recommended that:

- divisions receive specific Commonwealth funding, under Mental Health, to facilitate meetings and engagement between private psychiatrists and local GPs, particularly to increase GPs referral options for urgent consultations.

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

It is recommended that:

- the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists clarify and document the skills, approach, and areas of special interest that private psychiatry can offer general practice.

State Level

It is recommended that:

- the availability of a psychiatric review for patients discharged to the care of GPs becomes standard practice in Area Mental Health Service discharge planning, if requested by the GP;
- With patient consent, a short progress report is sent to GPs from treating psychiatrists every 3-6 months to improve communication and ensure informed physical and mental health management in primary care;
- The Mental Health Branch consider rotations between public and private sector psychiatrists, and for public psychiatrists to have experience in the community in a private capacity, in order to encourage greater understanding of the role of GPs.