

# Urgent Psychiatrist Advice to GPs

## New Psychiatry Support Service for GPs Now Available

A new, freely available psychiatry support service for GPs funded by the Australian Government under the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* Initiative has been launched. It will provide GPs with timely, quality clinical advice from psychiatrists on management and/or treatment of patients with an urgent mental health problem.

The service will be a pilot to January 2005. It is available to **all** GPs, not just those enrolled in *Better Outcomes*.

Two models of service delivery are being trialled. McKesson-Asia Pacific Pty Ltd in partnership with Educational Health Solutions (EHS) will provide a seamless service available to all GPs in each State and Territory EXCEPT SA. The service will be available 24 hours, 7 days a week, via a 1800 number, by fax or email. GPs will receive advice in writing **within 24 hours**.

For all South Australian GPs, the SA Divisions of General Practice Inc will provide a state-wide service that will build networks between GPs and private psychiatrists. GPs can request urgent advice via telephone, fax or email and will receive advice within 24 hours. In addition, a one-off consultation will be offered for assessment and advice where appropriate between the GP, psychiatrist and consumer.

The service is available Monday to Friday from 9am –5 pm (excluding public holidays), and from 9 am – 12 noon on Saturdays. During these times, an operator will respond directly to telephone, fax and email requests by GPs. Requests received outside these hours will be monitored by the Project Officer to ensure all requests are actioned within the 24-hour timeframe. There is no paperwork required from GPs.

To access the South Australian service, please:

Phone: 08-8172 2050

Fax: 08-8271 8344

Free call 1 800 558 077

Email: [upasa@sadi.org.au](mailto:upasa@sadi.org.au)

To access the service in all other States and Territories, please:

Phone: 1800 200 588

Fax: 02-9425 3879

Email: [psychsupport.com.au](mailto:psychsupport.com.au)

For more information about the scope and objectives of this service, please contact Christina Koniaras on 03-6804 0777 OR Katie Barwell on 02-9425 3738. For the South Australian Service, please contact Roberta Morris on 08-8179 1701

GPs have long called for better communication and timely access to psychiatrists' advice. GPs deliver the majority of mental health care in Australia – more than 75 per cent of those who seek help for a mental health problem see a GP first. Until recently, we have been relatively unsupported. It is concerning to GPs when they are presented with an acute patient and the next appointment with a psychiatrist is weeks if not months away. This service is a national first and will provide GPs with advice from psychiatrists within 24 hours”

***Dr Rob Walters, Chair, Australian Divisions of General Practice***

## Relevant Questions and Answers

### **Q. In what circumstances can the service be accessed?**

A: The service enables GPs managing patients with a mental health problem to access urgent clinical advice from psychiatrists in any circumstances that could escalate into a more serious problem without prompt intervention. The service is appropriate in situations where clinical advice on patient management is needed within 24 hours, sooner than is possible through scheduled case conferencing or referral mechanisms. The service is **not** intended for use in situations in which crisis assessment or emergency intervention is required.

### **Q: How will the 'psychsupport' website security be ensured?**

A: All information transferred between the GP and the psychiatrist through the psychsupport website is encrypted. The server is behind an intelligent firewall that has intrusion detection and prevention, and virus scanner.

### **Q: Is there training available for GPs and psychiatrists?**

A: Psychiatrists participating in the service will receive training on the aims and objectives of the service. Whilst there is no training required for GPs to access the service, GPs will receive information regarding the scope and objectives of the service through an extensive awareness and promotional campaign.

### **Q: Is there any cost or remuneration to GP for using the service?**

A: The service is fully funded by the Australian Government and is offered to **all** GPs free of charge. Psychiatrists engaged to provide clinical advice are remunerated for their services from funds allocated under the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* Initiative.

### **Q: Which psychiatrists will be providing the clinical advice to GPs?**

A: All advice will be provided by psychiatrists who are registered to practice in Australia. Psychiatrists have been selected based on their understanding of general practice and the pressures and constraints in which GPs practice, as well as previous experience in providing emergency advice and in teaching other medical professionals.

### **Q: How will patient privacy be protected?**

A: The use of all information collected about a patient including any advice provided by the psychiatrist will adhere to the Australian Government Privacy Legislation requirements.

### **Q.: Will the service be evaluated?**

A: The service will be evaluated under the national framework for the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative.

For a more detailed Question and Answer document please go [www.adgp.com.au](http://www.adgp.com.au) and look under National Programs, National Primary Mental Health Care Network, 'What's New'.

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