



News Release

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

GPs worried about dementia epidemic

The Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP), Australia's peak body representing the divisions of general practice network, has warned that GPs will bear the brunt of an imminent dementia epidemic.

ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters said today that the government's recognition of dementia as a national health priority in 2004 was important, and welcomed the investment of \$200m over the next four years to dementia.

Dr Walters said today that the release today of the Access Economics report, *Dementia Estimates and Projections: Australian States and Territories*, is timely and affirms the recognition of the condition as a national priority. The report estimates that nearly 52,000 people will be newly diagnosed with dementia this year and 175,000 by 2050.

"The report shows an increase in the number of people with dementia of 12.5% for 2005 and 25% by 2050 over previous estimates, a situation that must be addressed," said Dr Walters.

According to recent BEACH data approximately 25 percent of all GP consultations are provided to the elderly (65 years plus) and that this number is gradually increasing due to the ageing population. BEACH data also indicates that GP encounters at which dementia was managed numbered between 389,000 and 500,000 per year over the two years 2002 - 2004. This figure was estimated to be low due to poor diagnosis rates and treatment plans.

"Patients with dementia are often suffering from multiple chronic and complex conditions and diagnosis of dementia is sometimes difficult," said Dr Walters.

"For this reason, it is urgent that we act on the implementation strategies outlined in the Government's election commitments. GPs need to be supported in prevention activities and training in early detection techniques for dementia. Detection, prevention and research are of critical importance to not only to delay the onset of dementia and improve quality of life, but also to reduce the future cost burden to the community," he said.

"The earmarking of funding for GP education under the Dementia as a National Health Priority will ensure greater support for GPs to work in primary care teams, giving patients better access to a range of allied health professionals who work with the GP on care plans for patients with complex conditions such as dementia."

ADGP CEO Ms Kate Carnell said that divisions of general practice were well positioned to assist with the development and roll out of prevention and training programs.

"In its 2005-2006 Federal Budget submission, ADGP stated that general practitioners play a key role in assisting people with dementia to achieve the best possible quality of life," said Ms Carnell.

"They are critical to early detection and diagnosis of the condition; ensuring people are referred to appropriate secondary care as well as playing a vital role in the long-term management of the health of people with dementia. A skilled GP who is well supported with links to allied health and community services can also make a significant contribution to easing the burden of carers of people with dementia.

"There is a growing identified need for a systematic, coordinated national approach to assisting the GP workforce to better detect and manage dementia with a focus on a multidisciplinary approach to care involving GPs, geriatricians, psycho-geriatricians, neuro-psychologists, aged care staff, allied health professionals & pharmacists," she added.

"This can be achieved through programs such as the divisions' Aged Care GP Panels initiative, which provides better access, education and training to coordinate the care of elderly Australians."

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