



**Australia's general practice immunisation newsletter**

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**SBOIC Network Meeting 23 November**  
**Back:** Laurie Barrand, Dr Greg Rowles, Theresa Scanlon, Tasia Malinowski, Helen Moore  
**Front:** Michelle Wills, Hailey Shaw, Jasmine Parker, Honor Putland

**Gardasil**

The Commonwealth Government recently announced that it will fund the cervical cancer vaccine Gardasil for girls and women aged 12 to 26 from 2007. Gardasil will be put on the National Immunisation Program on an ongoing basis for 12 and 13 year old girls which will be delivered through a school based program. A school based catch up program will also be run for the next 2 years for 13 to 18 year old girls and the funding will allow for 18 to 26 year old women to be vaccinated through General Practices.

Information on this new vaccine, the delivery time frames and the relationship between Human Papillomavirus and cervical cancer can be found on the Department of Health and Ageing web site at;

[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/gardasil\\_hpv.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/gardasil_hpv.htm)

and on the NCIRS fact sheet site; [http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/hpv\\_oct\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/hpv_oct_2006.pdf)

As part of the education process associated with the new HPV vaccine it is very important to stress the need for all women aged between 18 and 69 to continue with their regular Pap smear tests whether or not they have been vaccinated.

The vaccine is available now through general practices at a cost of about \$460 for the 3 injections that are required. The funded program is proposed to start after April 2007. Girls 13 to 18 year of age will be able to access the vaccine through the schools program or their GPs while women 18 to 26 will need to visit their GP.

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Information contained within this newsletter is intended to inform you on immunisation issues with a national perspective. As such, it is possible that some references will require adjustment to be made specifically accurate for service providers in each individual State or Territory jurisdiction. For further clarification, contact your SBO Immunisation Coordinator or jurisdiction Health Department.

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*Honor Putland, Laurie Barrand  
Greg Rowles and Michelle Wills*



## PBAC

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) has been prominent in the media recently and has been attributed with tasks and responsibilities it does not necessarily have. It is important to understand the various roles of PBAC and ATAGI (the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation) so we can understand how the decisions are made on funding vaccines.

PBAC has recently taken on an additional responsibility with respect to vaccines. This is the funding advisory role previously dealt with by ATAGI. ATAGI now advises PBAC on matters relating to the ongoing strength of evidence pertaining to existing, new and emerging vaccines in relation to their effectiveness and use in Australian populations. ATAGI is now able to use its expertise to focus fully on evidence based effectiveness studies and not on the economic analysis necessary for the cost effective appraisal needed for funding permission.

PBAC now has two immunisation experts (one of whom is a member of ATAGI) and also seeks advice from other experts in the appropriate areas of immunology and (for Gardasil) from sexual health. So these experts add to the information provided to PBAC by ATAGI. The cost effectiveness of a vaccine is considered by PBAC with the benefit of the financial and economic background of other members of the committee.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) is an independent statutory body established in 1954 under section 101 of the National Health Act 1953 to make recommendations and give advice to the Minister about which drugs and medicinal preparations should be made available as pharmaceutical benefits. No new drug (and now vaccine) may be made available as a pharmaceutical benefit without this recommendation.

The Committee is required by the Act to consider the effectiveness and cost of a proposed benefit compared to alternative therapies. In making its recommendations the Committee, on the basis of community usage, recommends maximum quantities and repeats and may also recommend restrictions as to the indications where PBS subsidy is available. When recommending listings, the Committee provides advice to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Pricing Authority (PBPA) regarding comparison with alternatives or their cost effectiveness.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/health-pbs-general-listing-committee3.htm>

## Varicella Zoster Virus

The **varicella zoster virus** workshop organised by NCIRS and held in Sydney in November provided excellent information and food for thought and discussion for the attendees. Prominent international guest speakers included Professor Myron Levin (US), Professor Anne Gershon (US) and Professor Judith Breuer (UK). These were joined by a host of well-respected local speakers including Professor Margaret Burgess and Associate Professor Alison Kesson. Presentations from this workshop will be made available by NCIRS shortly on their website: <http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/newsevents/index.html>

The varicella campaign should gain momentum in 2007 with the school based vaccination programs being rolled out in various jurisdictions. Divisions and general practices will be able to time a reinforcement of the advantages of the vaccine with the school publicity and information programs.



## Australian General Practice Network Forum

The eighth annual General Practice Forum was held on the Gold Coast in late November. It was very well attended with over 1100 delegates who enjoyed the networking, the information, the venue and the call to transform the divisions into a single cohesive network. The annual party night theme was Motown and most participants appeared in a splendid array of Afro wigs, chunky jewellery, interesting purple flares and sparkly dresses. The range of speakers and workshop sessions provided a good basis for discussion and interaction with all involved. The enormous value of the divisions' network for primary health care was emphasised and reinforced over the three days. Those presentations and speeches for which permission has been given will be uploaded on the AGPN website shortly.

## New Branding for the Network

The re-branding of the network to the Australian General Practice Network was announced at the Forum and agreed to overwhelmingly be divisions at the Annual General Meeting. This new branding will promote our network as a very positive and cohesive organisation that is aimed at facilitating and improving the primary health care across the country through general practices.

## SBOIC Network Meeting

The State Based Organisation Immunisation Coordinators held their final networking meeting for the year on Friday 24 November just prior to the Network Forum. As well as pressing jurisdictional issues concerning vaccine management, ACIR reporting and low coverage of 4 year olds, the group discussed travel vaccines and the advantages of looking at coverage rates by postcode areas. Dr Darrell Price, a Gold Coast Paediatrician and Associate Professor at Bond and Griffith Universities, addressed the group on the need for vigilance and positive promoting of vaccines. His talk was very informative and gave a timely reminder to all on the need to avoid complacency when it comes to immunisation. Recent cases of imported measles and the possibilities of polio emphasise the importance to maintain high coverage rates.

## NCIRS Fact Sheets

The National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance provides good relevant information concerning immunisation and vaccine preventable diseases. The centre produces Fact Sheets which are an excellent resource. The NCIRS website can be found at <http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/> and the Fact Sheets directly at [http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/fact\\_sheets.html](http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/fact_sheets.html)

## Immunisation Kit

The *ADGP Immunisation Kit: a practical guide to effective vaccine management* has been reprinted and copies are now available. Please contact me on the email address or number below if you would like a copy. The publication is designed to be a useable resource which can be added to when necessary and copied to provide information for others.

**Best wishes to everyone for the festive season.**

**Have a wonderful and safe holiday and a great 2007!**

