Welcome to the RCNA Community and Primary Health Care Faculty electronic newsletter, eCommunity. The faculty was established to facilitate the exchange of information on community and primary health care issues. eCommunity is transmitted fortnightly and is an efficient means of keeping you up-to-date on relevant news items and media releases in this specialty area of health care. We endeavour to present a diverse range of opinions and the views expressed in eCommunity are not necessarily those of RCNA.

**RCNA UPDATES**

**Events**

**NOTICE OF MEETING**

RCNA’s 62nd Annual General Meeting will be held on **Wednesday 25 May 2011** commencing at 4pm EST at Dockside venue, Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour. Member link-in via teleconference facilities will be available. All enquiries to freecall 1800 061 660.
**RCNA UPDATES**

**Policy and news**

**Emergency department scholarships for nurses and staff**
The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is offering scholarships covering a wide range of skill levels for nurses working or planning to work in emergency departments. Royal College of Nursing, *Australia* (RCNA) is administering the Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (NAHSSS): Emergency Department on behalf of the government. [http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room](http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room)

**RCNA negotiates deal for nurses**
With Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) now a requirement for registration for nurses, Royal College of Nursing, *Australia* (RCNA) has secured affordable cover for its members. “We are very pleased to announce on International Nurses Day that a personalised package for professional indemnity insurance is now available through RCNA membership,” CEO of RCNA, Debra Cerasa says. [http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room](http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room)

**IND 2011 – RCNA launches national nurses breakfast**
Thousands of nurses will be kicking off International Nurses Day at a collective Royal College of Nursing *Australia* (RCNA) National Nurses Breakfast 2011 event. On 12 May 2011, breakfasts to celebrate nurses will be linked across the country and even internationally to acknowledge the massive contribution that nurses deliver to the health of society. [http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room](http://www.rcna.org.au/publications/press_room)

**HOT TOPICS**

**Budget overview**

**Health Budget in brief**
*Royal College of Nursing, Australia – 11 May 2011*

Below is a snapshot of the health budget. Mental health and regional infrastructure projects were the big winners. There are some opportunities for nurses in this year’s budget and we will be following up with the Department of Health and Ageing to obtain more information. [http://rcna.org.au/publications/press_room](http://rcna.org.au/publications/press_room)

**Your guide to budget health coverage @ Croakey**
*Croakey blog – 12 May 2011*

There has been a veritable deluge of budget coverage at Croakey in recent days. To help readers negotiate it all, here is a summary. The stories are grouped under the headings of mental health, Indigenous health, public health, general reaction, and cancer. [http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2011/05/12/your-guide-to-budget-health-coverage-croakey/](http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2011/05/12/your-guide-to-budget-health-coverage-croakey/)

**ANF welcomes government’s mental health boost**
*Australian Nursing Federation – media release, 11 May 2011*

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) and the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) have welcomed the Gillard Government's $1.5 billion boost to Australia's mental health services. "After years of neglect, this is a serious commitment to addressing Australia's mental health services," ANF Assistant Federal Secretary, Yvonne Chaperon, said. [http://www.anf.org.au/html/media/news_media_110511.pdf](http://www.anf.org.au/html/media/news_media_110511.pdf)

**Unprecedented investment in primary mental health care is about leadership**
*The University of Queensland – media release, 11 May 2011*

Medicare Locals have been placed at the forefront of mental health reform in Australia following the Gillard Government’s Federal Budget 2011-2012 announcement this evening, in which a third of the extra mental health funding will be delivered through Medicare Locals. [http://agpn.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/37909/20110510_med_budget-1.pdf](http://agpn.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/37909/20110510_med_budget-1.pdf)

**More community-based support for people with mental illness and their families**
*Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services – joint release, 10 May 2011*

Around 35,000 Australians with mental illness and their carers will have access to much-needed support with a $269.3 million boost over the next five years to community mental health services. [http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/mediareleases/2011/pages/b04_10052011.aspx](http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/mediareleases/2011/pages/b04_10052011.aspx)
HOT TOPICS

Nurses honoured

Red Cross aid worker earns nursing’s highest international award

**Australian Red Cross – media release, 16 May**

Australian Red Cross nurse and aid worker Noela Davies has received nursing's highest international honour, the Florence Nightingale Medal which is awarded by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Ms Davies, a registered nurse and midwife, has worked for Red Cross in conflict zones around the world. The Queenslander, currently based in Mt Isa where she works for the Royal Flying Doctors, has been on Red Cross missions to countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, and North Darfur in Sudan. [http://1.redcross.org.au/?fuseaction=newsroom.latestnews&sub=656](http://1.redcross.org.au/?fuseaction=newsroom.latestnews&sub=656)

Territory’s top nurses and midwives honoured

**NT Minister for Health – media release, 13 May**

The achievements of Northern Territory Nurses and Midwives were celebrated tonight at the 2011 NT Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards hosted at Parliament House by Minister for Health Kon Vatskalis. The eighth annual Awards ceremony was held to recognise the outstanding contributions of Nurses and Midwives throughout the Territory over the past year. “The NT Government values the vital role played by our nurses and midwives, and we will continue to invest in this area, having already boosted nursing numbers by over 600 since 2001,” Mr Vatskalis said. [http://www.newsroom.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=viewRelease&id=8216&d=5](http://www.newsroom.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=viewRelease&id=8216&d=5)

Honouring our nurses

**NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research – media release, 13 May**

Nurses are the fabric of any health system – the quiet achievers who work around the clock across NSW saving lives, or caring for our sick and injured. NSW is fortunate to have more than 43,000 registered and enrolled nurses, working daily on the frontline of our busy hospitals, nursing homes and health clinics – the unsung heroes of the health system, the Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, said today. [http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2011/20110512_00.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2011/20110512_00.html)

Minister presents Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards

**Get Networking – article, 13 May**


Honouring Victoria’s dedicated nurses and midwives

**VIC Minister for Health – media release, 12 May**

Minister for Health David Davis today paid tribute to the more than 90,000 nurses and midwives who work or have worked in health services and aged care facilities in Victoria. To mark International Nurses Day and the International Day of the Midwife, Mr Davis visited St Vincent’s Hospital where he shared breakfast with nurses and thanked them for their ongoing care and professionalism. [http://premier.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/927-honouring-victorias-dedicated-nurses-and-midwives.html](http://premier.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/927-honouring-victorias-dedicated-nurses-and-midwives.html)

Fellowships awarded to three WA nurses and midwives

**WA Government Department of Health – media release, 12 May**

Three of the State's nurses and midwives have each been awarded a $20,000 fellowship to fund important research projects that will help improve patient care in Western Australia. “The awards provide a wonderful opportunity for recipients to further their studies, and improve nursing and midwifery education and practice in Western Australia," said Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, Catherine Stoddart. [http://www.health.wa.gov.au/press/view_press.cfm?id=993](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/press/view_press.cfm?id=993)
HOT TOPICS

Physician assistants

Closure of the Physician Assistant Program at The University of Queensland
The University of Queensland – media release, 11 May 2011
It is with great regret that The University of Queensland Physician Assistant Studies Program, offered through the School of Medicine will not be admitting any more students. This was a pioneering program in Australia with the objective to train mid-level health care practitioners who would work under the delegated authority of a medical practitioner. This decision has been taken by the School of Medicine in the light of a combination of key factors. This includes the resignation of the Program Director and the difficulty in recruiting a replacement within this field, the significant uncertainty about the future of a physician assistant workforce in Australia, and the associated financial risk.

Reaction to University of Queensland’s closure of Physician Assistant Program: what a shame for rural health
Croakey blog – 12 May 2011
I think that it is a shame that UQ has ceased its program. It was a brave and innovative approach that they took in commencing the program and deserved success. In the light of the positive outcome of the trial of the PAs in Qld, when the evidence was there as to the potential benefits for the rural and remote communities, to withdraw now is premature and unfortunate. I think that there is a strong future for PAs in Australia and others will carry the program forward. http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2011/05/12/reaction-to-university-of-queenslands-closure-of-physician-assistant-program-what-a-shame-for-rural-health/

It’s time to make physician assistants part of the Australian health workforce
Croakey blog - 13 May 2011
Ben Stock, OAM, will become one of Australia’s first “home-grown physician assistants” when he soon graduates from the University of Queensland. Stock has already had 23 years experience as a medic in the Royal Australian Navy, and is used to working in isolated, challenging conditions. During his time at sea, he has been responsible for the health care of surface ships and submarine crews, often without even having radio backup. In short, he’s worked in more isolated and challenging conditions than many health professionals. Here is his response to the University of Queensland’s announcement this week of the closure of its PA program, which has been generating some revealing commentary at Croakey.

HOT TOPICS

Health care topics

Clinicians taking the lead
Minister for Health and Ageing – media release, 20 May
Clinicians will be front and centre in ensuring all Australians have access to high quality, coordinated healthcare as a result of the Gillard Government’s National Health Reforms. Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals are today being called on to provide input into clinical leadership structures with the proposed model of Lead Clinicians Groups released for final consultation.

So the Government wants to get serious about cutting PBS spending? Here’s how...
Croakey blog – 19 May
The Federal Government has drawn widespread criticism for its decision to defer PBS listing of medicines approved by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. But there are other ways it could save money on the PBS. And the Government can’t say it hasn’t been told about these (although those urging spending cuts are rarely as vocal or influential as those pushing for more spending).
## HOT TOPICS

### Health care topics

**Fast track Medicare Locals for benefit of Australia’s health**

**Australian General Practice Network – media release, 18 May**

The Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] is urging the Federal Government to fast track the commencement of as many Medicare Local primary health care organisations as possible from 1 July rather than limit the first roll out to 15. “Medicare Locals, evolving from Australia’s General Practice Networks, have been designed to better integrate general practice and other primary health care services around the needs of patients and communities,” AGPN Chair Dr Emil Djakic said today.


### Conversations: is a doctor the only solution?

**The Drum, ABC – 13 May 2011**

Today, healthcare: "When people get sick or injured or want advice about their health, they want to see a doctor." - Dr Andrew Pesce, AMA President. So does this ring true? What about the role of allied health workers, the use of nurse practitioners for minor ailments and allowing pharmacists to authorise repeat prescriptions to ease the load on GPs? Is it really a case of the doctor’s way or the highway?

[http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/2681488.html](http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/2681488.html)


### A cure for our chronic lack of health care choice

**The Conversation – 12 May 2011**

Patients may want to see a doctor but they don’t necessarily want to join a waiting list. Medical graduate numbers have almost doubled over the past decade and yet we still have difficulty attracting doctors to rural areas. So what’s going wrong? It’s likely that our renumeration system, which pays specialist doctors far more than general practitioners, is partly to blame.


### A decade to make roads safer and save lives

**Global Health Hub, Sarah Arnquist – article, 11 May 2011**

Crossing the street was the scariest thing I encountered on my first trip to India. Before I learned to weave with the traffic and dodge motorbikes and auto rickshaws, I hired a rickshaw to drive me to the other side of a road. People complain about Boston drivers, but at least they tend to stop for pedestrians at crosswalks. Crosswalks are a rarity in most low-income countries.


### More scope for MRI service rebates

**The Australian, Sue Dunlevy – article, 11 May 2011**

More patients will get access to highly expensive magnetic resonance imaging tests and doctors will be paid a higher Medicare rebate if they provide them free of charge to patients under a $104.4 million program. For the first time, general practitioners will be able to refer patients for MRI services that are safer, do not emit radiation and use magnetism and radiowaves to take better images of soft tissues. At present, only specialists can refer patients for the services, forcing patients to pay for, and wait months to get, a specialist appointment.


### A game plan to win the coming fight against superbugs

**The Conversation, Matthew Cooper – article, 10 May 2011**

We depend on antibiotics to treat what previously were fatal conditions. But the more we use them, the more the bacteria they fight become resistant to all the weapons in our arsenal. Bacterial resistance to antibiotics (antimicrobial resistance) is a natural consequence of antibiotic use. This phenomenon, driven by natural selection, cannot be eliminated by managing antibiotic use alone.

HOT TOPICS
Health care topics

Obesity coalition calls for junk food ad ban
ABC News – article, 9 May 2011
A national obesity lobby group says there is strong public support for restrictions on food advertising aimed at children. The Obesity Policy Coalition, a national coalition of leading health groups, is releasing an obesity blueprint, seeking a ban on junk food advertising to children under the age of 16. It is proposing government restrictions on junk food advertisements in children's television shows, movies, the internet and in public areas. http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/05/09/3211635.htm?site=news

Research links obesity to mental illness
Brisbane Times, Nicky Park – 8 May 2011
Research in Australia has for the first time discovered a direct link between obesity and mental illness. A team at the University of Tasmania found overweight girls who don't shed the extra kilos as they grow up double their risk of suffering depression as adults. Using data collected from 1135 girls in 1985, and again 20 years later, they found "persistent obesity" was linked to the mood disorder. http://news.brisbanetimes.com.au/breaking-news-national/research-links-obesity-to-mental-illness-20110509-1eehh.html

Pokies report provides good advice says public health expert
Croakey blog – 6 May 2011
The first report of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform – titled “The design and implementation of a mandatory pre-commitment system for electronic gaming machines“ – was released this morning. The recommendations are “balanced, fair and progressive”, and will bring real benefits for those with serious gambling problems, says Dr Charles Livingstone, Deputy Head of the Department of Health Social Science at Monash University, and a member of the Australian Government’s Ministerial Expert Advisory Group on Gambling. http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2011/05/06/pokies-report-provides-good-advice-says-public-health-expert/#more-4866

Nurses are the ‘front line’ answer to tackling NCDs but need greater support
International Council of Nurses – media release, 5 May 2011
Nurses want to lead in the global fight against the further spread of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)* but workload and time constraints are holding them back, according to a major new survey by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and Pfizer. http://www.icn.ch/images/stories/documents/news/press_releases/2011_PR_06_Survey_Pfizer_FINAL.pdf Full results can be accessed here: www.icn.ch/news/NCDsurvey_results.

Mental health, social justice – and a program that works
Croakey blog – 5 May 2011
One of the more important health conferences has been underway in Sydney over the past two days. As you may have already seen, Pat Anderson delivered a powerful keynote to the third Coalition for Research to Improve Aboriginal Health (CRIAH) Conference. CRIAH is a collaboration between the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council NSW and the Sax Institute. http://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2011/05/06/mental-health-social-justice-and-a-program-that-works/#more-4862