

17 February 2010

Practice Nurses essential to fighting chronic disease

If the government is serious about promoting comprehensive primary health care through general practice, extending incentives to employ Practice Nurses is the best first step, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair, Dr Emil Djakic.

Speaking at the AGPN National Nursing in General Practice Forum 2010 this morning Dr Djakic said only rural areas were supported to employ nurses but patients in urban and outer metropolitan areas also deserved access to their skills and care.

"Practice Nurses (PNs) make a significant difference to patient health outcomes. They are an essential and accepted workforce in general practice and will be vital to dealing with the chronic disease burden faced by general practice.

"They are a necessary part of the practice workforce and we want to see one in every general practice," said Dr Djakic.

More than 130 Practice Nurse Network Officers from around the country have gathered in Melbourne to discuss practice nursing models and celebrate the PN role.

In his keynote address to the group, Dr Djakic discussed ways to improve patient access to general practice nursing and extending nursing capacity.

AGPN continues to lobby government to extend the Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) to urban general practice and support the AGPN Nursing in General Practice program.

AGPN's Federal Budget Submission 2010-2011, called for \$18 million over three years to extend the program, which has supported a significant increase in PN numbers. Since the program started in 2003 PN numbers have almost doubled to around 8000 PNs in 2007. About 60 percent of general practices now have a nurse.

"We want to see 100 percent of practices employing a nurse. We know there are barriers to recruiting and retaining nurses and some GPs don't understand their value, but these are all issues our Practice Nurse Networking Officers can support general practice to overcome," Dr Djakic said.

Dr Djakic, who has worked with PNs for 20 years said he would not be without one, nor would he want his patients to be without one.

"Practice Nurses offer patients the benefit of multidisciplinary care, but also a different approach to care made possible through their unique training and professional culture," said Dr Djakic.

A copy of the AGPN Budget Submission 2010-2011 can be downloaded at www.agpn.com.au.

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