

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum – 12 October 2001

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FEDERAL ELECTION

The NRHA's Election Charter for the election that has been called for 10 November 2001 was released on 17 September 2001. The full text of the Charter is available at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/charter.htm>

The AMA has called for all candidates to convince voters they are committed to Medicare and have solutions to the problems faced by doctors and patients every day. AMA media statements are available at <http://domino.ama.com.au/AMASWeb/MediaRel.nsf/Media?OpenView>

Health is of course a major issue in the election. A useful summary of ongoing developments in each policy area, including health, is available at the ABC election site, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/fedelection/default.htm>. Stories at the site at present include the Australian Nursing Federation welcoming Labor's \$52 million package to address the shortage of nurses in public hospitals and aged care facilities and the Council on the Aging welcoming the Prime Minister's proposal to help frail, older Australians remain in their homes rather than go into nursing homes.

Each Party has an active website providing information on policies. For example

\* Election statements by the Prime Minister, including the aged care announcement, are available at <http://www.liberal.org.au/MEDIA/campaign/HOWARD/howard.HTM>

\* Labor's website at <http://www.alp.org.au> lists policy statements such as a simpler GST for pharmacists, Labor's plan for a national dental health scheme, and reducing aged care red tape.

\* the National Party's policies are posted at <http://www.nationalparty.org/policies/index.htm>. A health policy is yet to be posted.

Democrat policies are listed at <http://www.democrats.org.au/policies/>, including a rural health policy. This policy calls for additional funding for

- \* Additional incentives for medical, nursing, allied health workers and midwives to practise in rural areas
- \* Specific programs promoting the access of students from rural areas into medical and allied health courses
- \* Increasing health promotion, counselling and mental health services; including 24 hour

information and referral service

- \* Capping of medical malpractice payouts and structuring payments
- \* Supporting tele-medicine and other information technology systems in rural areas
- \* Promoting a more flexible rural workforce including the role of nurse practitioners and Aboriginal health workers.

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### GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT WITH RURAL DOCTORS

Prior to the calling of the election, the retiring Minister for Health and Aged Care, Dr Michael Wooldridge, announced that negotiations between general practice organisations and the Government had led to new initiatives to improve the retention of doctors in rural areas and enhance the delivery of care for patients with chronic and complex illnesses. The announcement results from discussions between the Government, the Rural Doctors' Association of Australia and the Australian Divisions of General Practice.

The new initiatives include:

- \* a 25% increase in retention payments to Rural Doctors, lifting payments to those doctors in the most remote areas to \$25000 a year, at a cost of \$8m over two years;
- \* the creation of a special committee in the Federal Health Department with the Rural Doctors' Association to provide policy advice on programs targeting rural doctors;
- \* dedicated funding to Divisions of General Practice for them to assist doctors in delivering new Medicare items for diabetes, asthma, cervical cancer and mental health at a cost of \$25m over three years; and
- \* a Review of government paperwork and how it impacts on general practitioners.

The full text of Dr Wooldridge's statement is available at  
<http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/yr2001/mw/mw01100.htm>

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### TRIBUTE TO DR ARNOLD "PUGGY" HUNTER

The Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Dr Michael Wooldridge, announced the establishment of an Indigenous Health Scholarship Scheme as a tribute to the late Dr Puggy Hunter. The scheme will provide funding for 44 scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertaking undergraduate medical studies, undergraduate nursing studies, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker accredited courses in the Vocational Education and Training sector.

"The scholarships will be known as the 'Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarships'," Dr Wooldridge said.

"They will be a lasting tribute to Dr Hunter's life long work to improve the health of Aboriginal peoples and his commitment to Aboriginal leadership and participation in the delivery of health services. "Dr Hunter was a passionate advocate for an increased role for Indigenous people in the management and delivery of primary health care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The 'Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarships' will contribute to this goal," Dr Wooldridge said.

The full text of Dr Wooldridge's statement is available at  
<http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/yr2001/mw/mw01104.htm>

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**MORE INDIGENOUS STAFF IN MEDICARE OFFICERS**

The Health Insurance Commission has announced that more indigenous staff will be working in Medicare offices in a HIC push to provide more culturally specific service to Medicare customers.

HIC Deputy Managing Director, James Kelaher said that "HIC aims to increase the number of Indigenous staff throughout the organisation to two per cent, providing direct benefits to the organisation and our customers". This figure represents the Indigenous population of Australia and means HIC will recruit approximately 60 additional Indigenous staff nationally over the next two years.

The full text of the HIC statement is available at <http://www.hic.gov.au/>

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**NARHERO WEBSITE**

The National Association of Rural Health Education & Research Organisations (NARHERO) has established a website. The site provides information on NARHERO's organisation, activities and membership. The site is at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/narhero/>

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**SMART CARDS AND A SECURE INTERNET**

Extract from "Real Results Real Jobs: The Government's Innovation Report 2001-2002", <http://www.innovation.gov.au/iap/report/200102.pdf>

The secure sharing of patient clinical data across the health care system is protecting the privacy of patients while giving health care providers access to timely and potentially life-saving information.

A new product, known as Smart Patient Data, is providing the health industry-including Government, health insurers and other service providers-with the chance to save many millions of dollars in administration costs.

The development of Smart Patient Data was made possible in part through a Federal Government ITOL grant of \$75 000. It has led to the establishment of a new business known as Smart Health Solutions Pty Ltd, which has now entered the market development phase and is seeking partnerships and licensing arrangements locally and internationally. The business has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a United States health technology company. In addition to export potential, Smart Patient Data is already being used in the Australian public health system.

<http://www.smarthealth.com.au/>

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is a forum for the expression of YOUR views. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator, Jim Groves, at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. As such, the Alliance does not control postings and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Alliance. Nor do postings necessarily reflect the view of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

The e-forum is sent to a mailing list of the Alliance and those have indicated interest through the subscription box at the NRHA Web site (<http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>). This issue is going to 1,162 recipients. Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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