

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum – 9 May 2003

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**NRHA STATEMENT – THESE MEDICARE CHANGES? NOT IN OUR NAME**

The National Rural Health Alliance has confirmed its opposition to the currently proposed changes to Medicare. The full text of the NRHA statement is reprinted below.

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PARTYline is the official newsletter of the National Rural Health Alliance. Keep up to date with rural health policy information and good news stories on living and working in the rural health community. Available online on <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au> or receive a hard copy by emailing [michele@ruralhealth.org.au](mailto:michele@ruralhealth.org.au)

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**OTHER REACTION TO MEDICARE PROPOSALS**

There has been a massive commentary on the Government’s proposed Medicare changes.

The Federal Government’s website explaining the package is at <http://www.health.gov.au/fairermedicare/index.htm>. A steady stream of media statements from Health Minister Kay Patterson is available at <http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/yr2003/kp/kpmr2003.htm> her media interviews are at <http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/yr2003/kp/kpi2003.htm>

Meanwhile, Medicare has top billing on the ALP’s website (<http://www.alp.org.au>) and the steady stream of media statements from Health spokesperson Stephen Smith is at [http://www.alp.org.au/media/search.html?task=latest\\_news](http://www.alp.org.au/media/search.html?task=latest_news). On the other hand, the front page of the Democrats website does not mention Medicare at all, although the Democrat Health spokesperson Senator Lyn Allison has described the package as a “dead duck” – her statement is available at [http://www.democrats.org.au/news/index.htm?press\\_id=2599&display=1](http://www.democrats.org.au/news/index.htm?press_id=2599&display=1)

Medical organisations' comments have been mixed. A joint statement by Joint Statement the AMA, the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP), the Australian College of General Practitioners, and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said that the package "does not adequately address the issues of access and affordability". This statement is available at <http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-5M5AX5> while all the AMA statements are available at <http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/topic/media>.

This statement followed a somewhat more supportive statement from the ADGP, which described the package as "a long overdue attempt to breathe life back into general practice". This statement is available at [http://www.adgp.com.au/client\\_images/6013.pdf](http://www.adgp.com.au/client_images/6013.pdf)

Meanwhile, RDAA spokesperson DR Ken Mackay followed up the statement with a comment that "we certainly agree with all the GP groups that this isn't the solution for what is needed for Medicare, what is needed for good health. But from the Rural Doctors' perspective a lot of the advantages and the benefits from this package certainly look a little bit more positive." The RDAA statement is at [http://www.rdaa.com.au/8\\_5\\_03\\_medicare\\_-\\_fairer.htm](http://www.rdaa.com.au/8_5_03_medicare_-_fairer.htm)

The National Medicare Alliance, including the Australian Consumers' Association, ACOSS, the Australian Nursing Federation, the Doctors Reform Society, the Health Issues Centre, the Public Health Association and the Australian Women's Health Network, have been critical of the package. Its website is at <http://www.nma.org.au/>

The ANF released the results of a Newspoll showing only 22% of people in favour. The ANF statement is available at [http://www.anf.org.au/news\\_media/news\\_press\\_030507.html](http://www.anf.org.au/news_media/news_press_030507.html)

Some ABC reports are at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s842731.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/s842080.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s842736.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s841768.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s841700.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2003/s842074.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2003/s843044.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s842946.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2003/s842390.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s849060.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2003/s848807.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2003/s848788.htm>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s845109.htm>

There has been some comment on the rural aspects of the package. RDAA president Ken Mackay was reported on the ABC as saying that few country GPs will be interested. "I said to the Prime Minister several weeks ago that I would estimate that something like 10 to 15 per cent would take up this package," he said.

The new medical workforce measures were welcomed by the Australian Local Government Association. The ALGA statement is at <http://www.alga.asn.au/newsRoom/mediaReleases/20030429.php>

The "Australian Financial Review" reported Ralph Shreeve, the managing director of Australia's largest general practice operator, Independent Practitioner Network, as saying that the changes carried

an unfair bias towards rural regions at the expense of city and suburban areas. "It costs us more to operate a clinic in Mosman than it does in Bendigo," he said. The AFR article is available at <http://afr.com/australia/2003/04/29/FFXE4R0D1FD.html>

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#### BUSH CRISIS LINE - 1800 805 391

Bush Crisis Line is a twenty-four hour confidential telephone support and debriefing service for multi-disciplinary remote and rural health practitioners and their families. It is staffed by qualified psychologists with remote and cross-cultural experience, is toll free and available from anywhere in Australia. For more information [http://www.crana.org.au/pandp\\_bcl.html](http://www.crana.org.au/pandp_bcl.html)

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#### CANCER SURVIVAL LOWER IN BUSH AND POORER AREAS, SAYS REPORT

Australians living in the bush have lower overall cancer survival rates than people living in metropolitan areas and rural cities, according to a new report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

“Cancer Survival in Australia 1992-1997: geographic categories and socioeconomic status” shows that men living outside metropolitan areas and outside large rural centres had relative cancer survival rates of 50 to 55% for all cancers at five years after diagnosis. This was significantly below the 57% experienced by males in capital cities, other metropolitan areas and large rural centres.

Women living outside metropolitan areas and outside large rural centres had five-year relative survival rates of 53 to 56% in remote areas, and 59 to 60% in rural areas. This compares with a figure of 60% for metropolitan areas and large rural centres.

Report co-author Dr Chris Stevenson said some of this difference may be explained by cancers in city areas being detected earlier so that survival appears longer. “However, there are still real differences in cancer survival between the city and the country. Some possible reasons include poorer access to primary medical care and cancer treatment services, the poorer survival and relatively higher populations of Indigenous Australians in rural and remote areas, and socio-economic status factors.”

The AIHW statement is available at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/media/2003/mr030430.html> and the full report at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm?type=detail&id=8581>

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The “Australian Journal of Rural Health” is a refereed journal with a national and international reputation for quality scholarship. Its focus is multi-disciplinary and it includes articles of interest to general practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, health administrators, universities and rural health units. Reduced rates apply to members of some organisations. For more information see <http://www.blackwell-science.com/ajr>

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**CBR PLANNING WORKSHOP**

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, in collaboration with Centre of national Research on Disability and Rehab. Medicine, invite all interested allied health professionals, health workers and researchers to participate in the inaugural CBR Planning Workshop and the establishment of an Australia-wide "expert" working group on Community Based Rehabilitation.

Specifically, the workshop will explore and propose strategies for the development of community based rehabilitation in rural and remote Australia.

Saturday and Sunday, 30-31 August 2003, the Boardroom, CONROD, University of Queensland Medical School, Herston, Queensland.

Registration \$40.00 (Includes morning and afternoon teas, lunches and workshop dinner on Saturday night). To register, or express interest, send an email, fax or letter to Pim Kuipers noting your name, postal address, phone, fax and email contacts. Please note if you require assistance with obtaining accommodation in Brisbane

Contact Dr Pim Kuipers, Research Fellow CONROD,  
University of Queensland, Herston, 4006  
Phone 3346 4786 Fax 3346 4603  
P.Kuipers@sph.uq.edu.au

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Extract from ABC Health-Updates  
(Health-Updates is a weekly alert about recent ABC health coverage available online. Information at <http://www.abc.net.au/health/maillinglist.htm>)

**FLYING FEMALE DOCTORS** (New Dimensions Health: 29/04/2003)  
Only 35 per cent of Australian GPs are female and a quarter work in country areas. Research has shown that the majority of women prefer to see female doctors, and country women often travel long distances to see a female doctor, or choose to ignore more intimate health problems. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is combating this problem by flying female city GPs to rural towns.  
[http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions\\_health/Transcripts/s842706.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions_health/Transcripts/s842706.htm)

**GPs IN OUTER METROPOLITAN AREAS DISSATISFIED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S MEDICARE PACKAGE** (PM: 07/05/2003)  
With the Government's package heading for a shaky trip through the Senate, another problem has emerged. The Government says it's targeting outer metropolitan areas with incentives to overcome the GP shortage. But doctors in those areas say that they've found most practices won't, in fact, qualify.  
<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2003/s849504.htm>

**LANDLINE: Royal Flying Doctor Service**  
Sunday 11 May, 12pm, ABC TV  
It's 75 years since a flimsy bi-plane took off on a medical flight from Cloncurry in Western Queensland. The RFDS was born out of necessity in the 1920s, when the outback was being settled

and medical attention was often days away. Today the necessity is as strong as ever with the service described in the bush as 'irreplaceable'. <http://www.abc.net.au/landline/default.htm>

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15 th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM)  
Global Crisis: Local Action  
Cairns Convention Centre, 22-25 October 2003

The annual ASHM conference is the major forum for the presentation of HIV and hepatitis research in Australasia where you will hear about all the latest advances in HIV and hepatitis medicine from leading local and international figures, such as Carol Jenkins, Alan Landay, Martin Markowitz, Haikin Rachmat, Ninkama Moiya, Greg Dore and Graham Cooksley.

The theme for the conference is GLOBAL CRISIS - LOCAL ACTION and is the Society's response to the UN declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS (GLOBAL CRISIS - GLOBAL ACTION).

Mark the dates in your diary and plan your trip now. For further information or to register online visit <http://www.ashm.org.au/conference2003> or contact us on [conferenceinfo@ashm.org.au](mailto:conferenceinfo@ashm.org.au) or +61 2 9368 2700

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From: Wal Taylor <[w.taylor@cqu.edu.au](mailto:w.taylor@cqu.edu.au)>  
Subject: Information Technology in Regional Areas Conference (ITiRA)

The Organising Committee of the Information Technology in Regional Areas Conference (ITiRA) invites submission of papers for its 2003 Conference.

Dates: 5 - 7 November 2003  
Venue: Rydges Oasis Resort, Caloundra, Queensland, Australia  
Deadline for the submission of full papers: 6 June 2003

Further details available at <http://itira.cqu.edu.au/2003> or please email [enquiries-itira2003@cqu.edu.au](mailto:enquiries-itira2003@cqu.edu.au)

The ITiRA 2003 Conference explores strategies that link ICT enhanced economic, social and cultural development efforts with emerging opportunities in such areas as electronic commerce, community and civic networks, telecentres, electronic democracy, on-line participation, self-help and virtual health communities, advocacy, cultural enhancement and others. We see ITiRA 2003 as being of interest to practitioners, and policy makers in both developed and developing countries, and are particularly interested to share ideas across practice, research and policy. Hence, ITiRA 2003 encourages submissions for double blind refereed papers as well as practitioner case studies and policy development.

#### Tracks

- \* Community Informatics
- \* IT for Developing Countries
- \* Indigenous Voices on IT for Indigenous Peoples
- \* IT for Regional Culture, Media and the Arts
- \* IT for Regional Education and Training

- \* IT for e-Democracy
- \* IT for Regional Health
- \* IT for Regional Industry and e-Commerce
- \* IT for Tourism in Regional Areas
- \* IT for Social Marketing in Regional Areas

Important Dates:

Full papers due: 6 June 2003  
 Notification of Acceptance: 12 July 2003  
 Final print-ready papers due: 15 August 2003

You may wish to view the recently published book "Current IT Issues in Education" edited by Tanya McGill <http://www.idea-group.com/books/details.asp?id=4041>

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Interested in becoming a "friend" of the Alliance? Become more involved with the work of the Alliance by becoming a "friend". "friends" support the Alliance by being an integral part of the Alliance's policy and evaluation process. They also receive other benefits. For more information on membership see <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

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**FEMALE PHARMACIST LEVELS CONTINUE TO RISE**

The number of female pharmacists is rising steadily, according to a report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

"Pharmacy labour force to 2001" shows the number of women employed as pharmacists increased by 11% between 1996 and 1999, compared with a 3% increase for male pharmacists. Women comprised 47% of all employed pharmacists in 1999, and 70% of hospital pharmacists.

Despite the overall increases in numbers, there is currently a shortage of pharmacists in Australia.

The full text of the AIHW statement is available at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/media/2003/mr030509.html> and the full report at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm?type=detail&id=8641>

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**RURAL HEALTH PROMINENT IN VICTORIAN BUDGET**

The Bracks Government will spend \$51.3 million on new initiatives to reduce waiting lists and improve the quality of health care in rural and regional Victoria, Health Minister Bronwyn Pike announced.

The full text of Ms Pike's statement is at <http://67.106.134.160/budget03.nsf/6192d1a614120d1eca256bad0004a211/819c616dc25e7b35ca256d1d00347e27?OpenDocument>

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### NEW ROLE IN SIGHT FOR OPTOMETRISTS

Queensland optometrists will have a greater role in treating eye disease under changes announced by Health Minister Wendy Edmond.

Ms Edmond said changes to Queensland regulations would allow appropriately trained optometrists to treat eye diseases such as glaucoma and conditions caused by diabetes.

"The change will particularly benefit patients in regional communities," she said.

The full text of Ms Edmond's statement is at <http://statements.cabinet.qld.gov.au/cgi-bin/display-statement.pl?id=12217&db=media>

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### WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION RESEARCH TOOLS

The World Health Organization (WHO) maintains a web page containing tools and information to assist in researching health matters. The page contains

- \* links to updates on disease outbreaks (including SARS);
- \* a library database containing all WHO publications from 1948 and articles from WHO journals and technical documents from 1985;
- \* a guide to epidemiological and statistical information available from WHO;
- \* international classifications relating to diseases and health; and
- \* geographical information tools.

<http://www.who.int/research/en/>

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### CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at [grovesc@winshop.com.au](mailto:grovesc@winshop.com.au) or use the eforum contribution box at the NRHA website, <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

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](mailto:grovesc@winshop.com.au).

This issue is going to 1,604 email addresses. Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, use the "sign up" box at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>. The archive of the newsletter is available at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au> under "Publications & News".

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FULL TEXT OF NRHA STATEMENT

1 May 2003

These Medicare changes? - Not In Our Name

The National Rural Health Alliance confirmed its opposition to the currently proposed changes to Medicare at a special telephone hook-up this week. The Alliance will endorse measured and supported workforce initiatives which will help rural consumers, but not changes to the universal nature of Medicare.

Nigel Stewart, Chairperson, said that rural people should be very wary of the proposed changes to the principles to Medicare made ostensibly in their interests. "Rural people will welcome the Government's intention to provide more undergraduate medical places and GP Registrar training positions for rural areas, and practice nurses for outer metropolitan areas. But these health workforce initiatives have been packaged to sweeten unacceptable changes to bulk-billing and Medicare," Dr Stewart said from Port Augusta.

"We are unhappy that Medicare will lose its core principle of universality if the proposed changes are adopted, and especially that the change is justified in the name of rural people. Without the principle of universality, the prospects would be very bleak for Medicare."

"Because it is based on the tax system, Medicare is administratively efficient and progressive - the more you earn, the more you pay. The universality of Medicare provides medical care as a right and not as 'a welfare safety net', and it is a relatively simple system. Co-payments and private health insurance do not have these positive characteristics. Finally, a universal system is politically stronger than a targeted safety net that could be further narrowed at the whim of governments, " Dr Stewart said.

The Alliance believes that alternatives exist for increasing the rate of bulk-billing in rural areas, for instance through a meaningful increase in the rebate and/or the possibility of differential rural rebates - known as rural consultation item numbers.

"The Government is right to believe that competition between GPs affects the rate of bulk-billing - but this is a pious hope in the many rural areas under-serviced by doctors. Improvements in the rural health workforce require measured, structured and supported increases in the supply of doctors and other health professionals. In the case of GPs the changes need to focus on aspects of practice which are particularly rural - like procedural work and indemnity cover," he said.