



'Docs In Schools'

NorthWestern Mental Health

“Successfully meeting the primary health needs of adolescents involves recognising their unique developmental stage, delivering services in ways that overcome barriers to access, and supporting positive health and help-seeking behaviours.”

L. Sancu, M Kang, B Ferguson. Improving Adolescents Access to Primary Health Care. *MJA* 2005; 183 (8): 416-417

'Docs In Schools' (DIS) is an exciting youth health initiative targeting young people in Victorian Secondary Schools. This program was developed in response to the growing evidence highlighting significant barriers encountered by young people when attempting to access General Practitioner's and the subsequent negative impact on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

DIS is a wellness model, which links a GP in with a Secondary School particularly where there is significant social and economic disadvantage. The aim of the project is to promote health-maintaining behaviours, educate and support young people in using GPs, and to detect and intervene early when illness arises, especially mental illness. DIS operates utilising a three-pronged approach:

- GP clinics at the school – 2 hours per fortnight (made up 4 x ½ hour bulk billed appointments). These involve assessing the young person's needs using HEADSS assessment tool, standard general practice treatment (excluding physical examination and drug prescriptions) and possibly referral. Following each clinic a case conference with the Student Welfare Coordinator and School Nurse takes place to handover any necessary information.
- Health Promotion/Access activities with student and staff groups coordinated/facilitated by Area Mental Health Services and other local health services.
- Linkages with local, youth friendly, health care services.

GP's involved in the program are offered training on '**Youth Friendly Practices**' - the guest presenter for 2009 will be Dr Melissa Kang (Lecturer Department of General Practice, The University of Sydney at Westmead Hospital) in addition to other areas of interest. For instance, in 2009 we will be running sessions on: '**Eating Disorders**' (Keynote speaker Dr Rick Kausman), '**Introduction to Personality Disorders**' and '**The Mental Health System**' among others.

Over 100 young people thus far have received a GP service “*on their turf and on their terms*” with extremely positive results and feedback.

“It's a great program! I feel well supported by the schools welfare team and am dealing with cases that I usually would not see at my practice”

“I wish we had a program like this when I was at school!”

(Quotes from GP's currently involved in DIS Program)

The program was piloted in 2003 by Priority Youth (a group of experienced and passionate health professionals) and officially launched in 2007 with the backing of Melbourne Health, the Department of Education and Training (now DEECD), Department of Human Services and the North West Melbourne Division of General Practice (now 'Impetus').

With the success of 'Docs In Schools' many other Secondary Schools across Victoria are keen to start up the program.

However, in order to continue to expand **YOU ARE NEEDED!**

We desperately need more GP's to help accommodate the Secondary School demand.

If you are interested, or would like to find out more, please contact:

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