

## **GPV Every Child Every Chance Project: We Need GPs.**

In the last four years the Victorian government has increased its focus on the health and well being of vulnerable children. Approximately 2000 Victorian children and young people each year enter the care of the Department of Human Services through the intervention of child protection services. These children are predominantly from disadvantaged families and are among the most vulnerable in the community. The majority of children taken into out-of-home care have experienced emotional or physical abuse or neglect. Many are likely to have experienced less than optimal primary health care and research has shown that they are more likely than other children to experience chronic health difficulties including developmental delay, post traumatic stress disorders, emotional and behavioural problems, infections, under-immunisation and poor dental health. They may also show signs of low self esteem and a reduced sense of positive identity. Although their medical and health concerns are not unlike other disadvantaged children, the rates of these problems are higher and the dysfunctions are more severe.

We as GPs are ideally placed to assess and look after these children. Research shows that they are less likely to have received continuity of primary health care than other children and may have undiagnosed or undetected health needs. New initiatives are being developed to improve the assessment of these children's health and well being and to ensure they receive appropriate health treatment and services. A DHS advisory committee met between October 2006 and April 2007 to provide input to the department about the design of a new system to achieve comprehensive health assessment for children entering out of home care. With input from GPV and from the late Dr Peter Waxman, the group agreed at the end of that process that all children should have a GP health assessment soon after coming into care. DHS has agreed to pay a fee for service to GPs to undertake these assessments.

I have been appointed by GPV as the North and West Melbourne General Practice Advisor for the Child Health Assessment Project. In our region it is estimated we have between 400-500 children in out of home care and DHS wishes to contract GPs to have a major role in the assessment of the health needs of these children.

Every child will have an 'Essential Information Record'. This record holds important information about a child/young person in out of home care that his/her carers will need to refer to in order to provide good care. The health section of this document will comprise: an initial health assessment by a GP which will be on a standard (hopefully electronic) proforma; a developmental and health assessment by a paediatrician for those children under 6; and a behavioural and emotional health assessment conducted by mental health professionals in the state-wide Take Two service.

We are being asked to undertake the initial health assessment, provide a brief report and recommendations to the child's case manager and to implement the referral if necessary to the paediatrician. Obviously there are lots of issues to consider for general practice: the timing of the appointments; the remuneration; the documentation; the legal

implications; the ongoing care of the child or young person. GP advisors from each region will continue to meet together with GPV and DHS to iron out these issues.

I am keen to hear from GPs who would like to know more about this project and any who would consider being involved in these important child and adolescent health assessments. I know how busy we all are but here is a fantastic way of being involved in the care of a particularly vulnerable group of people in our community and being remunerated while we are doing it.

GPV is currently developing a one day continuing medical education workshop for general practitioners and practice nurses about these health assessments and will apply to RACGP for recognition of this workshop as a Category 1 QA&CPD activity attracting 40 points in the new triennium. I will be taking part in a field trial of the workshop on 1 March 2008 to ensure that the workshop will meet the needs of general practice. Feedback from the field trial will help GPV refine a finished product that can be made available locally through our division.

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