More than 13,000 clients in treatment – what an achievement!

The July 2010 Census showed the number of clients in treatment in Victoria has increased to 13,185. We thank all the participating service providers for providing treatment to this increasing number of clients.

Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service

The Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service (DACAS) has recently updated its material which is now available on their new website: www.dacas.org.au

DACAS, a service for health professionals, provides advice and information on the clinical management of patients with drug and/or alcohol problems, including:

- advice on recognising and managing withdrawal symptoms
- substitution pharmacotherapies
- medical and nursing management of intoxication
- pain management
- management of medical and psychiatric complications associated with drug and alcohol use
- dual diagnosis issues
- behavioural problems
- drug information
- prescribing information
- assistance with cases of acute intoxication.

All DACAS calls undergo a preliminary call-screening process by an alcohol and drug counsellor from Turning Point’s telephone services. If a health professional wants to discuss complex clinical management issues with a DACAS consultant, brief details are taken and referred to the rostered consultant via a paging system. Callers nominate a call back request time (for example, within 10 minutes or an hour), leave their contact information and a brief description of the presenting issue or problem.

Callers are offered the option to consult with either a medical and/or a pharmacy consultant, based on the nature of their enquiry and their preference to consult within or outside their own professional discipline.

Phone: 03 9416 3611
Toll free: 1800 812 804

DACAS also provides a number of clinical fact sheets that can be downloaded from their website. These include topics such as:

- acamprosate in alcohol dependence
- alcohol withdrawal in general practice
- withdrawal from benzodiazepine
- cannabis withdrawal in general practice
- heroin withdrawal in general practice
- naltrexone in alcohol dependence
- naltrexone in heroin dependence
- heroin withdrawal precipitated by naltrexone
- psychostimulant withdrawal.

The Australian Family Physician, the journal published by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has featured street drugs in the Vol. 39 No.8, August 2010 edition.

Experts in their field such as Dr Benny Monheit, Dr Matthew Frei and Dr Dan Lubman have written articles that include:

- drug abuse
- prescription drug misuse
- opioid dependence – management in general practice
- cannabis and mental health – management in primary care
- party drugs – use and harm reduction
- heaven, earth, hell
- diagnostic dilemmas in substance disorders.
In her article ‘Heaven, earth, hell’ Jenni Parsons writes that:

‘Treating patients with substance disorders in general practice can seem like tough work. Think “substance abuse” and many of us have automatic word associations such as manipulation, disruption, risk, danger and illegality. It sometimes may seem easy to blame the victim and to forget that addiction is a genuine health problem and a very serious one at that.

Patients do not ask for addiction, or deserve addiction, any more than patients deserve depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease, cancer or stroke. These conditions are all the result of an amalgam of genetics, environment, poor choices, unhelpful behaviours, and often, merely chance.’

These articles can be read and downloaded online at: www.racgp.org.afp

National registration boards

From 1 July 2010, implementation of national registration boards, under the Statute Law Amendment (National Health Practitioner Regulation) Act 2010 (Victoria), means that a registered medical practitioner is now defined as a medical practitioner who is registered under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority (AHPRA).

What this means in Victoria

This change in definition means that prescriptions for Schedule 8 poisons written by any medical practitioner who is registered under AHPRA is valid in Victoria, under the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981.

When an interstate-approved Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT) prescriber is intending to prescribe for a patient to be dosed at a Victorian pharmacy, the prescriber should first make contact and ensure that the pharmacist is able to accept the patient. If they are, all relevant transfer details need to be sent prior to the patient temporarily transferring. The GP should forward copies of:

1. the prescription
2. any relevant transfer documents
3. a certified photograph of the patient
4. details of the previous dosing point.

Providing this information will assist the Victorian pharmacist to verify the identity and transfer details when the patient presents to the pharmacy with all the original documents.

There is no obligation in Victoria for the pharmacist to check if a valid permit/authority exists interstate, however the pharmacist may check to confirm with the relevant jurisdiction’s regulatory group that the prescriber is an ORT-approved prescriber.

If a Victorian pharmacy intends to dispense ORT for a patient on a prescription written by an interstate doctor, the pharmacist should notify the Drugs and Poisons Regulation Group (DPRG) of their intention, once the patient is accepted.

Please note: the October Pharmacotherapy Census includes a new field requesting the number of interstate clients dosed on 1 October 2010.

Key interstate contacts

ACT: 02 6207 9977
NSW: 02 9879 5246
Qld: 07 3328 9807
SA: 1300 652 584

Temporary transfers for Victorian ORT prescriptions will not be accepted by the Northern Territory, Western Australia or Tasmania.

Further information and forms to notify DPRG of temporary interstate transfers are available from the Department of Health website: www.health.vic.gov.au/dpu/pharm

Update on the Victorian Pharmacotherapy Review

The Victorian Pharmacotherapy Review conducted by the University of New South Wales Drug Policy Modelling Program in conjunction with Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre has been completed and a report submitted to the department. The review involved wide consultation with stakeholders and input from a project reference group. Recommendations will be considered by the department and Minister, and will inform future directions for ORT in Victoria.

General Practitioner training

New GP training workshops will be held late this year or early in 2011.

Interim measures to train interested GPs have been put in place for the present time. If you know of any doctors interested in training to prescribe pharmacotherapies, please advise Barbara Taylor (0407 911 953) barbara.taylor@health.vic.gov.au or Maureen Chesler (0418 221 452) maureen.chesler@health.vic.gov.au to make arrangements.
We’re happy to hear from you, just as we have from this father whose son was on ORT recently.

On my soap box

Twenty years ago we lost our son when he made the decision to follow the path to ruination, degradation, addiction and confrontation. Drugs! He swallowed, drank, injected, smoked and sniffed every illicit substance known. He rejected his family – mum, dad, younger brother and anyone who attempted to advise or help him in any way other than to acquire drugs for him, and so-called ‘friends’.

We tried so hard to help, guide and advise him, but to no avail. When his threats of violence turned from words to action, we reacted and had an intervention order brought against him.

After several years of living away, he asked if he could come back home. He had changed, he was trying to kick his addiction, and needed help and support. We agreed, he returned home and was a model son. He was generous, forgiving, hardworking and loving. We were a happy family unit for several months then the moods, demands and threats were once again being made. So we were forced to serve him another intervention order.

He left again, leaving some very sad, worried and confused people. Several more years passed with the irregular calls claiming that he was trying so hard to change but he couldn’t do it on his own. Our reply was that he would have to find someone else to help him as we were incapable of going through the heartache and anxiety that he’d put us through in the past.

Over a period of time, during our brief and infrequent visits, we started to notice a change for the better in him, but the pleas to return with the same arguments started again.

Eventually we believed there was a definite improvement in his attitude and the way he conducted himself, and then he, for the first time, admitted that he was and had been addicted to heroin and other drugs for many years, but was now on a substitution program, and with the help from the Salvation Army and various Victorian Government departments was confident that he could stay clean indefinitely.

Twelve months later our son is living at home sometimes and sometimes away, but the away times are voluntary (usually work-related). Yes we have our son back after all these years. A man now – a good one!

Networking, supporting and mentoring

How can we better support and help each other in the provision of care for opioid dependent patients?

Are they really too hard or is it that we feel unsupported as we struggle to provide the best possible care we can?

Studies have shown that general practitioners and pharmacists are more willing to take on opioid dependent patients if they feel supported – by case workers, outreach workers or advisory and/or referral services that provide a second opinion or useful advice when they are not sure of the best course of action.

On 11 November, there will be a meeting in Parkville that is designed to help health professionals to connect with each other and discuss issues related to opioid replacement therapy and treatment of drug affected patients. We invite you to come along and contribute to this discussion.

Do you have ideas you would like to share? Complaints to make? Suggestions for making life easier? Improvements to the system or any other burning issues relating to drug misuse – either licit or illicit? The forum will be thrown open to hear from you after we hear some wise words from Dr Mike McDonough, Fellow of the Chapter of Addiction Medicine and specialist advisor in the Victorian Department of Health.

So come along with your questions, suggestions and great ideas and meet lots of like-minded health professionals.

Fighting the dragon with luck

We have distributed several thousand copies of this DVD and would welcome your comments and opinions. Did you find it useful, interesting, confronting? Did your clients find it to be informative and helpful for them? Email Barbara or Maureen as previously shown.

APSAD Conference
28 November–1 December 2010

The Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs will be holding its conference in Canberra from 28 November until 1 December at the National Convention Centre.

A variety of interesting topics including plenary sessions relating to the Australian Medicine Reimbursement System through to alcohol dependence and foetal alcohol syndrome, treatment of opioid dependence in pregnancy, trauma and its intertwining with drug and alcohol dependence will be discussed.

For more information visit: http://www.apsadconference.com.au/
New pharmacies

Terry White Pharmacy
232 Carlisle Street
ST KILDA EAST 3183
Ph: 9534 2516 Fax: 9534 8726

Priceline Pharmacy Prahran
299 Chapel Street
PRAHRAN 3181
Ph: 9510 4253 Fax: 9510 9234

Heatherhill Road Pharmacy
48 Heatherhill Road
FRANKSTON 3199
Ph: 9783 9264 Fax: 9770 1359

Deer Park Discount Drug Store
Shop 4, 8 Hatchlands Drive
DEER PARK 3023
Ph: 8390 6606 Fax: 8390 6706

Syndal Pharmacy
202 Blackburn Road
GLEN WAVERLEY 3150
Ph: 9802 6618 Fax: 9802 4536

Regency Pharmacy
130 Regency Street
PRESTON 3072
Ph: 9478 4044

Low Price Pharmacy Watsonia
83 Watsonia Road
WATSONIA 3087
Ph: 9435 2904 Fax: 9432 0502

Olympic Village Pharmacy
13 Moresby Court
WEST HEIDELBERG 3081
Ph: 9457 4394 Fax: 9457 4394

Spencer Street Pharmacy
Shop 309, 201 Spencer St
DOCKLANDS 3008
Phone: 9600 1938 Fax: 96000 2134

Family Care Pharmacy
172 Welsford Street
SHEPPARATON 3630
Ph: 5821 3399 Fax: 5821 9697

Direct Chemist Outlet -Target Centre
154 Koroit Street
Warrnambool 3280
Ph: 5561 6558 Fax: 5562 3557

Linden Pharmacy
6 Linden Place
DOVETON 3177
Ph: 9792 2046 Fax: 9792 2046

Fitzgerald Road Pharmacy
104 Fitzgerald Road
SUNSHINE WEST 3020
Ph: 9360 5366 Fax: 9390 6447

Lancefield Pharmacy
15 High Street
LANCEFIELD 3435
Ph: 5429 1691 Fax: 5429 1019

Seutika Pharmacy
107 Chapel Street
WINDSOR 3181
Ph: 9510 1963 Fax: 9521 2740

Richard Edwards Pharmacy
36 Webb Street
NARRE WARREN 3805
Ph: 9704 7563 Fax: 9704 0401

Photographs of clients in ORT treatment

This is a reminder that all clients in ORT treatment must have certified photographs accompanying their pharmacy records.

The prescriber MUST certify a photograph for the pharmacist to ensure the correct person is receiving medication.
A recent original photograph of the client is preferred to a photocopy of a driver's licence. Most pharmacies are able to take passport type photographs for use with the patient records.

Remember: This measure is designed to protect you and your patient.