

## Counselling access for sons and daughters

**The Australian Government has decided to continue providing free counselling services to all sons and daughters of Australia's Vietnam veterans regardless of their age.**

**Comprehensive Government funded counselling services are usually available through the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service to sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans who are 35 years or younger. In 2001, arrangements were put in place to enable those aged 36 and over to also access this service up to 30 June 2006.**

**The decision to continue the service for older sons and daughters followed a review by the Department of Veterans' Affairs of the effectiveness of counselling to those in the older age bracket.**

**Approximately 17 per cent of the sons and daughters who have accessed counselling through VVCS are aged 36 years or over. Those using this service have been found to be vulnerable to life problems that arise from their parents' service.**

**The VVCS is accessible Australia-wide by calling 1800 011 046.**

# Roast beef on Sunday

We get up in the morning, go to work all day, come home, pat the dog, have a glass or two of wine, go to sleep in front of the television and go to bed. Weekends are a bit better, particularly in summer: shopping Saturday morning, dinner Saturday night, read the Sunday papers and do a bit of gardening and before we know it, it is Monday morning and back to the old routine.

Why do we do this? I guess the answer is because we have to, so we can manage school fees, mortgages etc.

The only real respite is around holidays and when we retire.

Yet when we retire, we have to adjust to a new routine and we have to find things to do.

Last week I was looking at the activities program of the Sir Leslie Morshead Nursing Home in Canberra: Monday is a trip to the Australian War Memorial followed by afternoon tea with



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the Airforce, multiple exercise sessions through the rest of the week, bingo on Friday nights, shopping and cinema bus trips, painting and craft, indoor bowls, belly dancing, visits from the hairdresser and roast beef for Sunday lunch. This all sound pretty good.

Putting this into perspective, many older Australians who live alone or are socially isolated, and are having difficulty remaining independent might be far better off in the stimulating, supportive environment of an appropriate residential care facility like Morshead Home.

Most residential care facili-

ties offer programs to promote physical and mental well-being and encourage social interaction with other residents, visitors and staff. Importantly, special needs of veterans and war widows are not forgotten.

On Anzac Day, Morshead holds a special commemorative service for the veterans and war widows which is also attended by relatives, members of the public and the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The veterans proudly turn out with their medals and enjoy the special significance of the day.

We often hear media reports of some of the unpleasant events that occur in residential care facilities yet rarely do we hear the positive feedback of care, support and satisfied need.

There are numerous stories of veterans living alone with a

questionable quality of life who, after entering a residential care facility, find a new lease on life. It has been said good and appropriate care puts life in your years and years in your life.

So the Morsheads and RSL homes need a pat on the back for the care they are providing for veterans and war widows, during what are, in many ways, difficult times.

The clear message here is that residential care sometimes gets a reputation that is undeserved and for many of us, at the appropriate time, it might well be the best option.

You need to be a special person to look after older people; a mixture of caring, patience and understanding. We owe the staff who provide this care a vote of thanks and our support.

## Make finding lost dentures easier

If you have a Gold Card or a White Card (with a relevant dental Accepted Disability) you are eligible to receive new dentures every eight years at DVA's expense.

In certain circumstances, the Department can authorise new dentures within this eight year period.

This might happen, for example, if there has been a change to

your dental condition that cannot be accommodated by denture modification or if the denture has been lost.

Dentures are often lost during a stay in hospital or in a residential aged care facility.

Dentists can label dentures so that their owner can be identified. The most common ways of doing this involve inserting a slip

of paper, including the owner's name or initials, just below the surface of the denture, or engraving details onto the surface of the denture.

Denture identification can be included when the dentures are being made or can be added to existing dentures.

You may wish to discuss with your dentist the option of

including identification with your new or current dentures. The Department pays a fee to dentists for denture identification.

Denture identification assists in the return of lost dentures and minimises the need to seek approval from the Department for replacement of lost dentures.

## Help available for a common problem

Continance Awareness Week was held in August to highlight the widespread health condition often ignored or misunderstood – poor bladder and bowel control. Continance problems are usually caused by weakness in the pelvic floor.

The pelvic floor is the 'hammock' of muscles stretching from the pubic bone at the front to the tail-bone at the back, and it's important not only for bladder and bowel control, but also for sexual function and response.

Bladder and bowel problems affect both men and women and are very widespread – affecting about one in five Australians – although the incidence is higher in women because of pregnancy and childbirth.

It's never normal and is certainly not an issue that should be dismissed because you're getting older or you've had a baby.

The good news is that pelvic

floor muscle exercises work well for men and women of any age, and recent research shows an 84 per cent cure rate among women who are assessed and 'coached' in their pelvic floor exercises by a continance (or pelvic floor rehabilitation) physiotherapist.

Help and information is available.

The Continance Foundation manages the National Continance Helpline (1800 330 066) for the Australian Government.

It's a free service offering a wide range of information leaflets on many aspects of bladder and bowel control – leaking, toilet frequency and urgency, constipation, haemorrhoids and wind.

These aspects of incontinence-related topics are, unfortunately, often taboo.

We can talk quite openly about bodily fluids like blood, sweat and tears – but not urine!

However, this picture is changing as people are becoming more comfortable discussing this health issue.

The Helpline is staffed by friendly Nurse Continance Advisors who can answer your questions.

They also have contact details for your nearest continance clinic or continance physiotherapist, as well as free leaflets.

It's important to remember that incontinence – even a small problem – won't get better on its own.

Those so-called small problems can get worse over time so it's important to talk to someone soon.

Talking to a Helpline advisor is a great first step in addressing this very important quality-of-life issue.

## DVA assistance

**Continance aids are available at DVA expense for those beneficiaries who have a clinically-assessed need. If you think you may be eligible for such aids, please see your Local Medical Officer or a Continance Advisor for an assessment and prescription.**

**Provision of continance aids can be arranged by your health provider through one of DVA's contracted suppliers.**

**If you would like assistance to locate your nearest prescriber you can contact the Continance Foundation Helpline on 1800 330 066.**

**The nurse will ask for your postcode and then advise you of the nearest prescriber.**

**For further information on DVA's Continance Aids program please call DVA on 1300 550 458.**