



Introduction

I am delighted to introduce to you the first edition of DVA InPHo (Department of Veterans' Affairs Information for Public Hospitals), a newsletter developed by DVA specifically for public hospitals.

DVA has a long history of partnership with public hospitals and recognises the importance of supporting public hospital staff who provide health care to the veteran community.

DVA InPHo will be published three times a year and aims to:

- inform you of recent DVA initiatives;
- feature articles relating to frequently asked questions; and
- provide DVA contact details and web links of interest.

Articles featured in this and future editions of DVA InPHo will cover a range of useful information and I urge you to distribute the newsletter as widely as possible among staff caring for veterans and their families in your facility.

Issue 1 of DVA InPHo features articles on:

- Services provided by the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service
- 'At Ease' mental health initiatives
- Hospital Discharge Planning Seminars planned for 2009
- Change to the reply-paid mailing address for Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre authority prescriptions
- DVA's Wound Care Resource Kit
- A reminder about food packaging for frail and elderly patients

- DVA representation at Health Provider Association Conferences
- Differences between DVA-funded respite and convalescent care
- DVA's Dose Administration Aids Service – MATES Program
- Referring DVA patients to private practitioners for assessment for RAP aids and appliances required on discharge.

Also included are:

- Useful DVA web links
- DVA contact details

I invite you to send your suggestions for future articles, queries and/or any other feedback on DVA InPHo, by email to: providerpartnering@dva.gov.au.

I am certain that DVA InPHo will be a valuable resource for staff who come into contact with members of the veteran community, and DVA looks forward to enhancing the important relationship it has developed with public hospitals.



Effe Cauchi

Acting National Manager
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Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service



VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service is a specialised and confidential service that provides nation-wide counselling, group programs and support to Australian veterans, peacekeepers, their families, war widows and widowers and eligible ADF personnel.

VVCS staff are qualified psychologists and social workers with experience in working with the veteran and defence communities. VVCS can provide a wide range of support and treatments for war and service-related mental health conditions including post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as support for lifestyle, health and family matters.

Services available include:

- **individual, couple and family counselling**
- **after-hours telephone crisis counselling through Veterans Line**
- **case management and care coordination services**
- **educative and therapeutic group programs covering health and wellbeing, relationships, lifestyle management and common mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and anger**
- **information, education and self-help resources**

The **Heart Health Group Program** is a great option for veterans needing to improve their general health and wellbeing. The program aims to help increase physical health and wellbeing through practical exercise, nutrition and lifestyle management support.

The program runs for 52 weeks and includes two physical activity sessions tailored to individual needs and 15 health education seminars. The program provides practical information and access to specialist advice and training and gives veterans the skills to improve and sustain their health and wellbeing.

Veterans living in rural, remote and outer metropolitan areas can access the **Heart Health Program** via a correspondence version. It has similar support to the group program.

The **Heart Health Program** gives veterans the tools they need to improve their physical health and ultimately enjoy a healthier and happier lifestyle.

Case Management Services

Sometimes complex personal or social problems can affect mental health and wellbeing. Some people benefit from having a case manager to help with setting

goals for improving their health and identifying services to help manage their situation.

A case management service is most suited to people who need help to manage the multiple issues that affect their mental health. VVCS case managers can coordinate services such as medical, pharmaceutical, psychological, psychiatric, social, family, vocational and financial. They can also help people to maintain family and social relationships and to build on their ability to be independent and active in the community.

To find out more information about VVCS including making a referral, please call: **1800 011 046** or visit our website:

www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs

Case Study: Getting life back on track...

Barry a WWII veteran, 81 years old, was admitted to hospital following, what he described as 'a turn', and is soon to be discharged. During his admission it was assessed that Barry was losing his cognitive ability, he was becoming more socially isolated, and displayed behaviours related to alcohol dependency. Barry reported that he has no visitors that come to see him, and that his family have given up on him. On further examination it was evident that Barry's living conditions were a cause for increased concern, as he was not eating the meals given to him from meals on wheels, he does not cook for himself, he lacks the physical capacity to clean his home, and the garden is significantly overgrown. Historically Barry has refused all assistance but since this recent admission to the hospital he is more willing to receive help. On Barry's hospital discharge he was recommended to see VVCS for case management.



PUT YOUR MIND **AT EASE** RECOGNISE > ACT > MAINTAIN

A veteran's military experiences may have taken place many years in the past, but they can continue to have a pervasive influence throughout life. There are at least two readily identifiable reasons for this enduring impact.

First, most veterans joined the services as young adults, an important time in life for shaping values, beliefs and attitudes. Because they were socialised into military culture at a time when they were malleable, many will have adopted military values and ideals as their own.

Second, during service, many of the highest impact experiences will have occurred during times of extreme stress, including life-threatening situations in some cases. What is learned under

these conditions can be resistant to change because it is associated with survival.

These experiences can often arise later in life and, in some cases, can create problems.

There are about 130,000 people within the DVA treatment population who currently have some experience with mental health concerns. Around 70 per cent of DVA's treatment population are also over the age of 70. This group is at higher risk of hospitalisation, particularly due to advancing age and physical health problems. Mental health concerns can become apparent during the stress of a hospital admission and can potentially impede recovery and discharge.

At Ease

DVA has a suite of mental health products under the banner 'At Ease' to encourage veterans to recognise possible signs, take appropriate action and assume greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. *At Ease* consists of fact sheets, posters, leaflets and brochures to provide information on common mental health problems and services available to veterans and their families.



The At Ease website: www.at-ease.dva.gov.au contains mental health resources and information for both the veteran community and service providers.

Mental Health Advice Book

DVA produces a Mental Health Advice Book to assist practitioners in managing common mental health problems in the veteran community. This book draws on the latest Australian and international best practice guidelines for the treatment of common mental health problems. The Mental Health Advice Book is available in electronic format on the At Ease website or can be ordered in hard copy via the website.

Where to go for more information or resources?

For more information on any departmental mental health initiatives, please contact the DVA Mental Health Manager in your location by phoning the provider line on:

1300 550 457
for metro callers or

1800 550 457
for non-metro callers.



Hospital Discharge Planning Seminars Planned for 2009



that, overall, they considered the presentations delivered and resources made available to be very useful. Participants also offered suggestions for improvement and these were incorporated into successive seminars.

With the completion of the series DVA conducted a review to evaluate the effectiveness of the seminars and to identify any necessary changes required.

A national series of Hospital Discharge Planning Seminars delivered by DVA in most capital cities throughout Australia over the last two years, was completed at the end of 2008.

The seminars, which were designed to inform and assist Veteran Liaison Officers and discharge planning staff providing health care to the veteran community in public and private hospitals, were well attended with some participants travelling significant distances from regional areas to participate. Responses to the seminars were generally positive, with participants indicating

A new series, planned to commence this year with seminars in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, will take into account the recommendations of the review.

The issue of DVA perhaps running seminars in regional centres has also been raised and, depending on availability of DVA resources, as well as interest from prospective participants, DVA is considering whether it could run two regional seminars – possibly one in Far North Queensland and the other in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales.

To enable DVA to gauge the extent of interest from hospital staff in attending a seminar in those regions, it would be helpful if you would indicate your interest by emailing the Provider Partnering team at: **providerpartnering@dva.gov.au**

Once arrangements have been finalised for the Hospital Discharge Planning Seminars in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, DVA will

send invitations to public and private hospitals in those States, for distribution to staff involved in discharge planning for the veteran community. DVA will also send invitations to hospital staff who have registered their interest direct with DVA in attending forthcoming seminars.

If you would like us to send you an invitation to a DVA Hospital Discharge

Planning Seminar in your State, you can register your interest by email to the Provider Partnering team at the above address. Please include your name, position, name and address of hospital, and your contact telephone number.

The team hope to see you at the next DVA Hospital Discharge Planning Seminar in your State.



Change to DVA's Reply-Paid Address

Applications for authority to prescribe under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) should now be sent to the Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC) using the free postal service address:

REPLY PAID No. 9998
VAPAC
GPO Box 9998
BRISBANE QLD 4001

We appreciate your attention to this update as Australia Post will be discontinuing the old reply paid number (372) in the near future.

For RPBS enquiries and telephone approvals 24 hours a day the Freecall number is: **1800 552 580.**



Wound Care Resource Kit

Last year, the DVA Wound Care Resource Kit was launched by Senator Trish Crossin, on behalf of Minister Allan Griffin, at the Australian Wound Management Association's national conference. The kit contains a wall chart, pocket flip book and CD-ROM. It was developed by Associate Professor Geoff Sussman under contract with DVA.

The Wound Care Resource Kit aims to assist prescribers to utilise the correct dressing for a particular type of wound. It is intended that the kit will assist in the proper care of wounds and the efficient usage of wound dressings.

The development of the Wound Care Resource Kit was an initiative under the Government's Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) program. The QUM program aims to improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of veterans and war widows through awareness raising and education. Its focus is on helping veteran and war widow patients to

manage their medicines wisely, to reduce the risk of poor health and hospitalisation.

In mid-2008, Wound Care Resource Kits were distributed to general practitioners and pharmacies nationally, as well as to community nursing organisations contracted with DVA and residential aged care facilities.

A copy of the information contained in the Wound Care Resource Kit is available as an online resource on the DVA website at: www.dva.gov.au/health/provider/woundcare.htm

For further information on the kit, you can contact DVA by email at: qum@dva.gov.au



A Reminder about Food Packaging for Frail and Elderly Patients

Just a reminder that frail and elderly inpatients may experience difficulties with opening pre-packaged food items or even with the positioning of their meal trays. The Returned and Services League (RSL) of Australia has advised DVA in the past that some patients have reported problems with opening items such as pre-packaged butter and drinks.

DVA appreciates that the provision of meals in hospitals is subject to ongoing or regular review by staff to take account of the needs of individual patients, and encourages any hospital initiatives which may help to minimise any difficulties for patients.



DVA Representation at Health Provider Association Conferences 2009

DVA is committed to supporting those who provide health services to the veteran community. One way DVA does this is through its trade exhibits at various State and National health provider association conferences.

Health providers, particularly those from rural and remote locations, have limited opportunity to have face-to-face contact with DVA staff, and these conferences provide this opportunity. Conference delegates can also select from a wide range of DVA resources and information which will assist them in caring for the health of the veteran community.

In the first half of 2009, DVA will feature trade exhibits at the following conferences:

Rural Health West Annual Conference, Burswood Convention Centre, Perth, 4-5 April

Australian Association of Practice Managers' Staff Development Day, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Brisbane, 18 April

Australian Practice Nurses Association Conference, Grand Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne, 30 April – 2 May

Australasian Podiatry Conference 2009, Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, Gold Coast, 12-16 May

Pharmaceutical Society of WA Pharmacy Conference, Burswood Convention Centre, Perth, 24 May

Rural Doctors Association of Queensland Conference, Gold Coast International Hotel, Gold Coast, 5-7 June



DVA will also be arranging to exhibit at a number of conferences in the second half of the year and will advise of these in the next edition of *DVA InPHo*.

Dose Administration Aids: Preventing Medication Error Veterans' MATES module 16

The Veterans' Medicines Advice and Therapeutics Education Service (MATES) provides patient-specific information to doctors based on the pharmaceuticals that their veteran patients are taking. This information is presented in separate modules, each on a different topic, comprising information for the veteran and a therapeutic brief for health professionals. The topic of Module 16 is: "Dose Administration Aids: Preventing Medication Error".

Module 16 provides information on the new DVA Dose Administration Aids (DAA) Service and updates General Practitioners on the now simplified process for this Service. The DAA Service was launched in March 2008 and has since been modified following feedback from health professionals. Further information on the DVA DAA

Service can be obtained at: www.dva.gov.au/health/daa or by phoning **1800 552 580**.

For more information on the Veterans' MATES program, or to access material from various modules, please go to: www.dva.gov.au/health/veteransmates.





What are the differences between DVA-funded Convalescent and Respite Care?

DVA offers assistance with Convalescent and Respite Care and there is often confusion surrounding these types of care, including distinguishing the difference between the two and the differing entitlements of DVA clients.

Convalescent Care

DVA Convalescent Care relates to a short period of medically prescribed convalescence for an eligible person who is recovering from an acute illness or operation.

Eligible DVA clients are entitled to a maximum of 21 days Convalescent Care each financial year only available immediately following an approved hospital or day procedure centre admission and prior to returning home. Those patients who are awaiting

permanent placement in aged care facilities are not entitled to Convalescent Care.

Convalescent Care is generally taken in an aged care facility or hospital and requires approval from DVA prior to the commencement of the care. Discharge planners or hospital staff (social worker, charge nurse or treating doctor) can organise Convalescent Care if it is medically necessary.

Prior to requesting Convalescent Care, the Department expects that other options have been considered such as inpatient or outpatient rehabilitation, and referral to community services such as Veterans' Home Care or a contracted community nursing provider. Convalescent Care should be arranged in the most

appropriate residential setting available to meet the need for care.

If a veteran or war widow/widower has been in hospital or a convalescent institution, discharge planners should ensure, prior to discharge, that they are capable of caring for themselves, or that a carer is available to take over the caring. Should this not be the case, further Convalescent Care, where a veteran or war widow/widower is eligible, or other care arrangements should be put in place.

Requests for Convalescent Care should be directed to the DVA Medical and Allied Health section by telephone on: **1300 550 457** (metro callers) and **1800 550 457** (regional callers).



Residential Respite Care

Residential Respite Care is available under the Veterans' Home Care program in circumstances where the person receiving the care enters the residential facility from independent living in his/her own home.

Respite Care is intended to provide alternative care arrangements with the primary purpose of

giving carers or care recipients a short term break from their usual care arrangement. It is not intended to provide transitional care whilst awaiting admission to permanent care or rehabilitative or Convalescent Care following discharge from hospital.

Requests for Respite Care should be directed to the Veterans' Home Care Assessment Agency by telephone on: **1300 550 450**.



Referral of DVA Beneficiaries to Private Practitioners for Assessment for RAP Aids and Appliances Required on Discharge

As with the general community, as DVA beneficiaries age, their need for more complex aids or appliances increases, and it is not always practical for discharge planners to conduct home visits. In these circumstances, referrals can be made to appropriate private assessors (e.g. Occupational Therapists (OTs)), who are often best placed to conduct assessments for appropriate equipment in a beneficiary's home environment.

Referral to a private OT is often the best outcome as many members of the veteran community already have established clinical relationships with private OTs or other suitable private assessors.

Referral to an assessor known by a beneficiary, and with knowledge of their clinical circumstances, can provide continuity of service and reduce possible confusion which some veterans may experience when returning home following a period of hospitalisation.

To ensure that a private assessor can conduct a timely assessment of a beneficiary's needs it is helpful if they are given as much prior notice as possible of the planned discharge date.

For urgent requests, particularly for items required to support beneficiaries with palliative care needs, the RAP Program has the capacity to expedite provision of a range of aids and appliances.



Health Providers making such requests in writing should note that the request is "URGENT & PALLIATIVE" or they may wish to make direct contact by telephoning the DVA Provider Enquiry number:

1300 550 457
(Metro) or

1800 550 457
(Country)

select Option 1 for RAP.

Useful contacts

Provider enquiry numbers:

1300 550 457 (Metro callers) or
1800 550 457 (Country callers)

DVA website:

<http://www.dva.gov.au>

DVA Fact sheets:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/factsheets/default.htm>

Feedback about newsletter:

providerpartnering@dva.gov.au