



healthupdate

Safety and Quality conference

It was fantastic to see the large number of consumers at the conference and hear their positive contributions towards this important topic.

See the full story on page 2.

Get to know your medicines

Seven fact sheets developed by CHF and the National Prescribing Service are now available.

See the full story on page 3.

Membership renewal

Thanks to all CHF members who have renewed their membership for 2007-08.

We look forward to receiving those renewals that are still outstanding. Please contact the Secretariat if you require further information.

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In the news

Political promises must deliver

The political parties have put health on the election agenda, but politicians must put consumers' needs first, CHF chairperson, Mitch Messer, said in a media release last week.

'We are pleased to see that both parties seem to be listening to consumers but they need to follow this up with real consumer involvement rather than use it as a new way to bicker about finances,' Mr Messer said.

'We are looking forward to an election debate about health that will deliver safe, good quality health care to everyone when and where it's needed. Health care must be affordable for Australia and individual consumers,' Mr Messer said.

He said the new \$2.5 billion health fund announced by the Government had great potential to address many issues, but all decisions on how the funding should be spent should include consumer input.

Likewise, the Labor Party's announcement that it would involve consumers in its National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission was welcome, but must be followed up with consumer involvement in all phases of the implementation of reform.

See the full media release at [http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/Political%20promises must deliver for health consumers.pdf](http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/Political%20promises%20must%20deliver%20for%20health%20consumers.pdf).

Mersey Hospital shows need for real consultation

In the CHF regular column in *The Australian*, 'Patient Perspective', Chairperson Mitch Messer asks what should happen when consumers do not agree, or the needs of some consumers appear to conflict with others.

The solution is 'real consultation', where the facts are laid out for all before consultation begins; for example, the available resources and reports. During consultation, the interests of some groups of consumers must not given more weight than others for political ends.

As the election draws nearer consumers must 'be vigilant in scrutinising the promises of all political parties and judging them against whether or not they represent a good use of resources,' Mitch said. 'As payers, we have both a right and strong incentive to ensure health resources are used to deliver health outcomes for consumers, and not simply votes for politicians.'

To view the full article cut and paste the following link into your webbrowser <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22296854-23289,00.html>.

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(In the news continued from page 1)

National register of health professionals needed

Executive Director Helen Hopkins appeared on national television on 31 July in an interview with the ABC's Midday Report. She commented on two current court cases of people practising as doctors without the necessary qualifications or registration. While recognising that most doctors can be trusted to be registered, Helen called for a publicly available national registration of health professionals that lists who is registered with what body and what that qualifies them to do. She congratulated the Medical Board of NSW, which now lists all NSW doctors and their registration status on their website.

Helen also gave interviews to 2SER Community Radio's Razor's Edge program on the appropriateness of using open websites to anonymously complain about doctors, and to an RMIT University trainee journalist on how doctors who make mistakes can be supported. She promoted open disclosure as a safety and quality issue.

Strong consumers' voice at Safety and Quality Conference

Consumers were a strong presence at the 5th Australasian Conference on Safety and Quality in Health Care in Brisbane on 6-8 August, which marked a shift in attitudes.

The conference was co-hosted by the Australasian Association for Quality in Health Care (AAQHC) and the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS). Key themes were different approaches to safety, open disclosure, e-health and staff management.

Consumers were very well represented, largely due to advocacy by CHF and its members. CHF consumer speakers included Chairperson, Mitch Messer, Governing Committee member Antonio Russo and Senior Policy Advisor, Craig Hooper. Around 70 participants attended a lunch-box session hosted by Mitch, 'It's all about communication.' Antonio spoke on the difference that consumer representatives can make to health professional education and accreditation of training courses. Craig gave a tutorial on the CHF E-health for Consumers Project.

Other consumer speakers included Coral Rizzalli, Russell McGowan, Christopher Newell, Sally Crossing, Ann Revell and Michelle Kosky. These presentations were well attended by both consumer representatives and providers.

While the theme of the conference focused on various methods to enhance safety and quality, there was a clear message that open disclosure and e-health are strong emerging issues. The fundamental importance of open disclosure to improving safety and quality in health care was discussed extensively from the provider and consumer perspectives. Issues addressed included the barriers to open disclosure, different models of open disclosure and how to ensure that open disclosure leads to improvement in safety and quality in healthcare.

E-health was discussed in the context of the range of opportunities electronic health records provide for improvements in safety and quality in health care. Issues of access, privacy and the reliability of electronic health information were high on the agenda.

What became most evident from the conference was that methods of delivery of health care are shifting, perhaps more than ever before, and that these changes will have significant impacts on safety and quality. In this changing environment, the importance of the ongoing participation of consumers in the planning, monitoring and delivery of health care services cannot be underestimated.

The official evaluation report of the conference is available at <http://www.sapmea.asn.au/sqhc2007/evaluation/>.

See the conference presentations at <http://www.aqhc.org.au> and <http://www.achs.org.au>.

Get to know your medicines

Seven fact sheets on medicines have been published by the National Prescribing Service (NPS) and co-branded with CHF as part of the NPS national awareness campaign to promote the quality use of medicines.

CHF initiated the fact sheets following consumer demand at Community QUM engagements. They deal with different aspects of medicine use, including generic medicines, how to remember to take your medicine, talking to your health professional about your medicines and using the internet to research medicines.

The 'Get to know your medicines' campaign includes the fact sheets, television advertisements, a website and peer educator community education sessions. Targeted at seniors and people with chronic conditions, it aims to improve consumers' awareness, confidence, skills and knowledge about their medicine use.

The campaign is part of the Community QUM Program. The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing funds the NPS to run the program in partnership with CHF and other consumer organisations.

The fact sheets will be distributed at Community QUM events and can be downloaded from the CHF website http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/Getting_to_know_your_medicines.pdf. See the campaign website and order bulk copies at <http://www.nps.org.au/site.php?page=2&content=/resources/NAC/index.html>.

Advocacy

Roundtable with minister discusses access card

CHF Executive Director, Helen Hopkins, and Policy Officer, Catherine Ellis, attended a consumer roundtable meeting on 8 August with the Minister for Human Services, Chris Ellison, to discuss the exposure draft of the health and social services access card legislation.

Of the many issues raised, a major concern was that marginalised and vulnerable groups such as young people, homeless people and indigenous people would have their access to government services and benefits reduced, not improved by the access card because they do not have the extensive proof of identity documents required to obtain an access card. Other issues included the need for the access card to have appropriate audit and monitoring systems in place.

The roundtable was well attended, with other CHF member organisations including the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Carers Australia, Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia and the Mental Health Fellowship of Australia.

The exposure draft of the access card legislation is available at <http://www.accesscard.gov.au/legislation.html>. The CHF submission to the Senate Inquiry can be seen at http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/441_Submission_Exposure_Draft_Access_Card_Bill.pdf.

Recognition for chronic conditions self-management

There is an increasing acceptance by health professionals of the need to incorporate chronic condition self-management support into education and training across the nursing and allied health professions. A strong consumer presence at the National Chronic Condition Self-Management Support Curriculum Workshop promoted the concept and the feedback was clear that there is value in supporting it. Discussion centred on identifying current gaps in curricula and how they could be closed. CHF congratulates consumer representatives on the steering group, Russell McGowan and Susan Mitchell, for the strong and influential consumer presence at the workshop, which was expertly facilitated by Norman Swan.

CHF gives guidance on privacy

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner is currently reviewing guidance material for private sector health practitioners. CHF contributed to this review by providing consumer scenarios that explain how the National Privacy Principles apply to the handling of consumers' personal health information. The scenarios covered:

- the handling of health information for a variety of conditions and practitioners
- the types of decisions about information handling that practitioners would face, and
- how practitioners and consumers would discuss sharing and handling their health information.

The Privacy Commissioner's website is becoming an increasingly useful resource for consumers. Go to the site at <http://www.privacy.gov.au/>.

CHF model used for cancer research

The Australia and New Zealand Health Policy journal has published a paper describing a Cancer Voices NSW project with the Cancer Council NSW that applies the *Model Framework for Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research*, developed by CHF and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). Cancer Voices NSW is a CHF member and its Chair, Sally Crossing, promoted the use of the model in the research project.

The model seeks to better align health and medical research with community need and improve the impact of research using a unique approach that shows how research can be considerate of public values. To see the article, go to <http://www.anzhealthpolicy.com/content/4/1/13>.

Exploring the link between depression and cardiovascular disease

The National Heart Foundation and Beyond Blue are contributing \$2.5 million each towards research into depression and cardiovascular disease. On behalf of CHF Executive Director, Helen Hopkins, Anne McKenzie attended a forum to discuss research priorities in this area and lost no opportunity to stress that consumers must be involved.

The meeting explored different areas of research and how to progress, including a detailed research agenda and sources of further funding. Expressions of interest to undertake the research are expected to be called in a few months.

Anne spoke on the CHF/NHMRC *Model Framework for Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research*. She stressed that all the research should include consumers from both the National Heart Foundation and Beyond Blue. She recommended that a consumer reference group be an integral part of the research team and develop good practice model for involvement. Research should include the patients' journey as well as serve the needs of clinicians/researchers, as this may give a different perspective to the research agenda.

Project updates

Safety and Quality Project: It's all about communication

The past month has been a busy time of planning, consolidation and collaboration for the CHF Safety and Quality Project.

Planning is well underway for two state-based workshops later in the year. Details will be posted on the CHF website shortly.

CHF has also been working closely with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. The Commission is developing a national model for accreditation of health care service providers and has just released a draft alternative model of accreditation. To help inform the model's development, the Commission is seeking written submissions from all interested stakeholders and holding a series of national consultations with different stakeholder groups during August and September, including one with consumers.

CHF participation in this process will include the development of an information paper on accreditation, due for release at the end of August, the facilitation of a half-day national workshop on accreditation for consumer organisations ahead of participation in the Commission's consultation for consumers on accreditation, and a formal submission to the Commission on their draft model of accreditation.

The next edition of *HealthUpdate* will include details of how to access and comment on the information paper. For details of the Commission's draft model, go to <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au> and follow the links.

Other recent activities of the project include working with CHF members to facilitate a strong consumer presence at the 5th Australasian Conference on Safety and Quality in Health on 6-8 August (see article on page 2). The impact of this work was evident in the high number of consumer participants and presenters at the conference.

Sarah Jones
Policy Officer

E-health for Consumers

CHF contributes to NEHTA review

An independent review of the National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) is examining the effectiveness of NEHTA in meeting its objectives, its communication and consultation process and possible roles for NEHTA or a similar organisation. The review is being conducted by Boston Consulting Group.

CHF made a submission to the review and Executive Director, Helen Hopkins, and Policy Officer, Catherine Ellis, met with Boston Consulting Group on 13 August.

CHF said NEHTA's primary objective to achieve standards was on track. However, wider e-health development objectives may have been beyond its scope and capacity. CHF also said that NEHTA communication and consultation with key stakeholders and consumers had been limited.

CHF recommended that a future role of NEHTA or a similar entity should engage in widespread communication and consultation with consumers and other stakeholders to research, develop and implement national shared electronic health projects. CHF also recommended an overarching coordination body for leading the adoption and implementation of e-health initiatives in Australia.

CHF's submission to the NEHTA review is available on the CHF website at http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/440_Submission_NEHTA_review.pdf.

Catherine Ellis
Policy Officer

Private Health Insurance Reforms – Consumers have a say

CHF makes submission to prostheses lists' review

When the prostheses list legislation was passed in 2005, CHF advocated for a review to monitor the implementation. That review is now being undertaken, with CHF making a submission after consulting with consumer representatives.

The submission raises concerns that the effectiveness of the review process is hampered by a lack of publicly available data about gap permissible products on the prostheses list. In addition, CHF recommended: improving information available for consumers to support informed selection of prostheses cover; ensuring health professionals meet their responsibilities in providing patients with information about costs to enable informed financial consent; and ensuring consumers receive clear information from surgeons to allow patient choice of the prosthetic device.

The submission also stressed the importance of ongoing involvement of consumer representatives in the implementation of private health reforms. The submission is available on the CHF website at http://www.chf.org.au/Docs/Downloads/439_Prostheses_list_review_submission.pdf.

Tamara Shanley
Policy Officer

Health News



New consumer website on pathology tests

Lab Tests Online is a not-for-profit service that aims to provide accurate, understandable information on pathology tests: why they are performed, the diseases and conditions they can detect and how to interpret the results.

The site was developed by the Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists with support from the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia and was launched by the Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott. It is based on similar sites in the USA and UK and has Health on the Net Foundation (HON Code) recognition. It has no advertising or sponsorship.

For more information, go to <http://www.labtestsonline.org.au>.

Understanding the side effects of medicine

The Australian Self-Medication Industry, a CHF organisational member, has launched a leaflet *Understanding the side effects of medicine*. It answers some common questions people may have about taking medicines, including how common side effects can be, what to do if you get a side effect, weighing the risks and benefits of taking a medicine and reporting side effects. It is targeted at both consumers and health professionals, who are encouraged to pass it on to their patients.

See the brochure at

<http://www.asmi.com.au/FINAL%20-%20Side%20effects%20brochure%20B&W%20A4.pdf>.

National medical registration reform

The Australian Medical Council (AMC) is preparing for national medical regulation reform. CHF nominates consumer representatives to the Council and many of the Council's committees. Steps towards the reform have included initiating a process for uniform national assessment of international medical graduates, preparing for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) medical regulation and accreditation reform agenda, establishing an expert committee to guide the development of a new national code of professional medical conduct and initiating a review of the AMC structure and governance in anticipation of the reforms. CHF met with the consultant conducting the review.

Take control of asthma

The Asthma Foundation of Victoria, a CHF member, will be promoting the theme 'Asthma is serious – you can take control' during National Asthma Week from 1-7 September. The message will be that every person with asthma should have a written asthma action plan that tells them how to manage their asthma on a daily basis, how to recognise when asthma is getting worse and what to do in an asthma emergency. The Foundation will be holding a series of community education sessions during the week. For more information, go to <http://www.asthma.org.au> or call 1800 645 130. For activities in other states, visit their Asthma Foundation websites.

Professional Services Review safeguards patients

A review of the Professional Services Review (PSR) Scheme has found that it continues to provide a safeguard for patients against inappropriate medical practice. While CHF was not represented on the review committee, it was consulted during the review.

The PSR helps protect the integrity of Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme by investigating instances of inappropriate practices and imposing sanctions where necessary. The review found the scheme continues to have the support of the health sector and should continue with some changes, including the appointment of an advisory committee and the broadening the scheme to include allied health practitioner services eligible for Medicare benefits. It also recommended the scheme's processes be streamlined and administration improved through consultation with professional colleges and medical bodies.

The Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott, said the recommendations would be implemented in consultation with the health sector.

To see the report, go to <http://www.health.gov.au/psr-review-report>.

Comment wanted on codes for nurses and midwives

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, in partnership with the Royal College of Nursing Australia, Australian Nursing Federation and the Australian College of Midwives is seeking comment on its new draft codes on the ethics and professional conduct for nurses and midwives. The latter two are organisational members of CHF.

For more information on the draft codes and how to comment, please go to http://www.anmc.org.au/projects/current_projects.php#codes.

CHF Consumer Representatives Program

Reports

Pharmaceutical Industry - Quality Assurance Reference Group (QARG) - Consumer Medicines Information

Diana Aspinall, July, 2007

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) is written for prescription and some non-prescription medicines. CMI are written by the company producing a medicine and presented to the Therapeutic Goods Authority (TGA) when the medicine is registered.

This committee meets quarterly to assess CMI content and to ensure quality assurance issues and improvements are documented. Any suggested recommendations are sent to the company producing the medicine and the CMI for the Australian market. They are followed up with the company.

The committee is a multidisciplinary group concerned with ensuring that medicine information is standardised and presented in an easily read and understood document. Membership includes pharmacists, nurses, industry representatives, communication experts, a consumer representative and a project officer. We use the Usability Guidelines, reviewed in 2006, as the best practice standard as it ensures a consistent framework and suitable language are used.

The committee assesses a set of CMIs at each meeting. The majority of companies provide well written CMIs so the consumer can be confident that when they request a CMI document from their doctor or pharmacist they are getting information that has been written using the guidelines. It is a large task for the committee to undertake to check the hundreds of CMIs that are available, so we assess from the top 100 medicines sold. Core CMIs have been developed for medicines that are used for the one condition; for example, lipid lowering medicines.

More information about the Usability Guidelines is available on <http://www.asmi.com.au/QUM.htm>.

Appointments

Kathie McClure from Health Consumers' Council (WA) to the Department of Health and Ageing Safety Monitoring Committee for Cervical Cancer Screening.

Cheryl Koenig from Greater Metropolitan Clinical Taskforce – Brain Injury Rehab Directorate to Medical Services Advisory Committee Review Panel Assessing MSAC Application 1109 – Deep Brain Stimulation for Essential Tremor and Dystonia.

Diana Aspinall from Arthritis NSW to the Quality Use of Medicines in Osteoporosis, Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Arthritis Project (QUM OPORA).

Ben Horgan from Arthritis Foundation WA to National Steering Committee for the Arthritis Awareness Workplace Self- Management Education Project.

Health Calendar

The Power of Apology in HealthCare: A Multi-disciplinary Symposium

Melbourne, 6-7 September 2007

Website: <http://www.ausmed.com.au>

Australian Health Insurance Association Conference

Melbourne, 8-10 October 2007

Website: <http://www.ahia2007.com/>

Anti-Poverty Week Seminar - Smoking as a poverty issue: Who pays the price?

Sydney, 18 October 2007

Email: info@ncoss.org.au

Public Interest Advocacy Conference

Sydney, 18-19 October 2007

Website: <http://www.piac.asn.au/news/index.html>

2007 Australian General Practice Network Forum

Hobart, 15-18 November 2007

Website: <http://www.gpnetworkforum.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=24600>

4th Biennial NSW Primary Health Care Research & Evaluation Conference

Sydney, 29-30 November 2007

Website: <http://www.growingtogether.unsw.edu.au/>

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