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New faces at VDHP

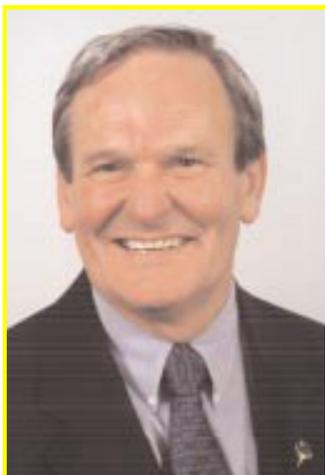
Dr Kerry Breen, Chairman, VDHP Board of Management

In December 2007 new Senior Clinicians, Dr Kym Jenkins and Dr Matthew Frei, commenced at the VDHP

Dr Kym Jenkins will serve as Senior Clinician/Director. She graduated from the University of Manchester and worked initially in general practice in the UK. After migrating to Australia in 1986, she returned to general practice for a short time before training in psychiatry. She was appointed a consultant psychiatrist at the Alfred Hospital in 1998 and recently she has been Acting Head of the psychiatric consultation-liaison service at the Alfred where she has been instrumental in establishing support services for doctors in training. Dr Jenkins is also serving in senior educational roles with the RANZCP.



Dr Matthew Frei has been appointed to the other Senior Clinician post on a two session per week basis. He brings his expertise in addiction medicine to the VDHP. He is a Fellow of the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine, and holds addiction medicine specialist positions at both Southern and Eastern Health. He is already familiar with the work of VDHP, having provided back up as a deputy to the inaugural Medical Director, Dr Jack Warhaft, since 2005.

**VDHP Board thanks Professor Greg Whelan**

Professor Whelan, who has been acting CEO since inaugural VDHP Medical Director, Dr Jack Warhaft retired, has agreed to stay on in a limited capacity for a short period to assist in the induction and orientation of our two new senior clinicians. The VDHP Board is very grateful to Professor Whelan for the outstanding work he did throughout 2007 in maintaining all VDHP services and in reviewing and providing advice to the Board on our future staffing needs.

The VDHP is a completely confidential and free service for doctors and medical students in Victoria.

It is a legal entity in its own right and is independent of the Australian Medical Association Victoria and the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria.

About the Victorian Doctors' Health Program

The VDHP was established in 2000 by AMA Victoria and the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria (MPBV), in part driven by the experience of the MPBV of being notified of ill and possibly impaired doctors who had been either late to seek medical help or appeared unable to access appropriate quality care. While unique in Australia, services similar to those of VDHP have been in existence in North America for many years.

We are an incorporated body run by a board of seven directors who serve on an honorary basis. The Program is funded by an annual grant from MPBV but remains fully independent of both the MPBV and AMAV.

Our primary purpose is to provide free confidential assistance to Victorian medical practitioners and registered medical students, including those who are ill or distressed, particularly those with impairment. We coordinate care and follow up, including supporting monitoring in doctors with substance use disorders (eg by random urine tests). We also promote better preventive health measures in doctors and medical students, support for families and partners, and are involved in research.

All doctors in Victoria are obliged to follow the Health Professions Registration Act 2005. Section 36 of the Act requires any treating doctor to notify MPBV if a doctor under his or her care who is seriously impaired continues to practice in a manner which may result in the public being put at risk. For VDHP participants with serious impairments who follow the advice and direction of their treating doctors in regard to fitness to practice, such notification is usually not required.

Some situations require careful consideration, and VDHP senior clinical staff liaise closely with treating doctors over such matters. Notifications to MPBV have been very infrequent but do occur where serious psychiatric illness or treatment-resistant substance dependence has clouded the insight of impaired doctors and led to their ignoring the advice of their treating doctors.

Dr Kerry Breen

The VDHP: What can you expect?

When I talk to people about my work at the VDHP, they often ask me about how contact with the service is made, the nature of the problems I see, and what we actually do to help.

While many doctors and medical students are self-referrals, we have an increasing number of 'assisted referrals', coming along at the suggestion of clinical deans, work colleagues, their treating doctors, or concerned family and friends. Doctors with significant health problems may come to us from the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria (MPBV). While the VDHP is independent from the MPBV, we are grateful for the opportunity to assist any medical practitioner, including those with MPBV involvement.

When someone contacts the program, the degree of our involvement varies from general advice and information to assessment and on-going support. Initial appointments are made to see one of the Senior Clinicians, and we always endeavour to see people quickly.

Our program's doctors and medical students are usually suffering from stress/burnout, mental health issues and/or substance

use problems. Interventions include organising in-patient treatment with referrals and follow-up. Treatment programs may vary from a referral to a specialist practitioner, to a comprehensive program that may include workplace support, peer support, chemical monitoring, advocacy, and regular follow-ups. We draw on an extensive resource of treating specialists to assist in a doctor's on-going health management, including psychiatrists, psychologists, General Practitioners, and addiction medicine specialists.

I have now been with the VDHP for five years, and feel privileged to be involved with a program that helps care for the medical profession. If there is one message that I would give to doctors, it would be that stress and illness are a part of **all** our lives at different times. If you are unwell or having difficulties for whatever reason, let someone know, and be open to assistance. Through working at the VDHP I have met some very inspiring doctors whose excellence as medical practitioners has often been enhanced – not diminished – by their struggles.

Cheryl Wile, Psychologist and Case Manager

Need help? Call the VDHP!

We are supportive, experienced, confidential and caring.

Ph 9495 6011

vdhp@vdhp.org.au

Level 8 Aikenhead Building

27 Victoria Pde

Fitzroy Vic 3065

Fax 9495 6033

Burnout

Cheryl Wile

If you have ever experienced burnout, you will know how harmful it can be. Anyone in the 'helping profession' is at risk – particularly doctors. Doctor shortages and rising patient:doctor ratios mean that doctors may experience stress, burnout, or other detrimental health effects, unless they are careful.

Burnout is reflective of severe exhaustion, and arises out of exposure to prolonged stress. Irritability, cynicism, dread, resentment, withdrawal, isolation, and detachment are classic features of the problem. People who are burnt out generally feel overwhelmed, helpless, emotionally void, and frequently depressed. Burnout may damage emotional, physical, and spiritual health, sometimes leading to 'escapism' behaviours as the person attempts to seek some form of relief.

The good news is that burnout is preventable – as well as treatable. Being aware of and attentive to stress and its symptoms may help circumvent a burnout response. The establishment of clear boundaries between professional and personal life, taking regular annual leave breaks, establishing formal and informal support networks, having outside interests, maintaining and nurturing relationships, and generally monitoring the 'balance' factor are all things that may help deflect significant emotional distress.

If you think you are experiencing burnout, talk to someone about it. While this can be done through informal networks, we encourage doctors to speak with a health care professional in order to obtain an accurate diagnosis and exclude other mental health disorders. Options can then be explored in relation to what is needed in the short term, as well as what might help address the issue on a longer term basis.



Cheryl Wile
Psychologist and Case Manager

	
tried & true methods for doctors to achieve burnout (Adapted from Richard Nelson's Therapist Burnout)	
1	Work long hours – especially nights!
2	If you MUST take holidays, take with you professional journals that you can read in your motel room. Also, check your e-mails at least twice a day and make sure you have your mobile phone with you AT ALL TIMES so you can be contacted by colleagues.
3	Don't take holidays.
4	If you happen to NOT be rostered on for an extended period of time (more than 1 day), contact the appropriate person ASAP and have this rectified.
5	Volunteer to be on call whenever possible.
6	Base your self-esteem and your self-worth EXCLUSIVELY on your work. Live your life without family, friends, pets, hobbies, and interests. If you have accidentally acquired any of these, ignore them. Your patients need you too much.
7	Take on ALL the hard cases and have LONG consultations. Preferably see them one after the other, even through lunch, and think about them when you're not at work – at 3am is a good time.
8	Believe that you can be a WINNER with EVERY case. Whether the issue is related to psychiatry, neurology, radiology, ophthalmology, immunology, gastroenterology, rheumatology - BRING IT ON !!! And remember, if there's no progress, it's YOUR fault.
9	Pay NO attention to your own health. Don't worry if you're not sleeping well, not eating properly, not exercising regularly, or if you don't have your own GP. All these things take time – and will take you away from your patients.
10	Don't delegate anything. Carry the burden and responsibility for everything. No one will ever do things as well as you. You are superhuman, after all...

VDHP Board: retirements and new members

The Annual General Meeting of VDHP held in November 2007 saw the retirement of two long serving Board members, Dr Paul Woodhouse and Dr John Court.

Prior to being appointed as a member of the Board of Directors of VDHP, **Dr John Court** had been a member of MBPV and Chair of the MPBV Health Committee in the late 1990s and had been a key person in planning for VDHP and bringing the concept to a reality. On the Board of VDHP, he enthusiastically contributed to its work and was determined that VDHP remained true to its original charter.

Dr Paul Woodhouse was a founding member of the Board of VDHP as an AMAV nominee. Like Dr Court, Dr Woodhouse served on a joint MPBV/AMAV working party which laid the ground work for the establishment of VDHP. Dr Woodhouse was extremely generous in his honorary work as a Director, taking responsibility for auditing our internal processes from time to time and taking on additional tasks on behalf of the two Chairmen with whom he worked. The medical profession at large should be grateful for the important roles both played in the establishment of VDHP.

AMAV has nominated **Dr Zoe Wainer** as a Director to replace Dr Woodhouse. Dr Wainer is a surgical trainee who currently chairs the Doctors in Training Section of AMAV. She has a deep interest in the health and well being of medical students and doctors in training and her background will be invaluable for VDHP.



MPBV has nominated **Professor Napier Thompson** to replace Dr Court. Professor Thompson is Chairman of the Department of Medicine (Monash Medical School) at the Alfred Hospital and currently serves as the President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. He brings his expertise in medical education and his College's interest in physician health to the work of VDHP.

Dr Kerry Breen

Get a GP!!!

Whether you're stressed,
Or struggling to wee,
If you're a doctor,
You need a GP!

She can help you stop smoking,
Or help you lose weight,
He can help with your depression,
Or just be your mate.

Having a GP,
Does not indicate,
That as a doctor,
You're not first rate.

It is more of a support,
Which all of us need,
For when we are lonely,
Or starting to bleed.

Even if you think,
Your English is correct,
It is always beneficial,
To have your essays checked.

Even an eye specialist,
Needs his own GP,
To pick up his lung cancer,
Or his HIV.

You must drop your egos,
And pull up your socks,
Coz now is the time,
To visit those Docs!

Written by Monash University
Medical Students

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Interested in improving your skills in treating doctors?

The VDHP is offering a one day interactive workshop, **Docs for Docs**, for GPs and other medical practitioners who would like to improve their skills in managing doctors as patients.

The workshop date is 12th September 2008, with the venue to be announced.

Please contact VDHP on 9495 6011 for expressions of interest.