

Chairman's Report (2009 / 2010)

The Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Doctors' Health Program

15 November 2010

It is with great pleasure that I present my Chairman's Report to the 2009 / 2010 Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Doctors' Health Program (VDHP).

There is no doubt that there have been extra challenges to our organisation during the past twelve month period – consequent upon the changes to the registration/regulation of medical practitioners and medical students, which became effective on 1st July 2010.

But before speaking of these challenges I wish to emphasise that the core business of VDHP has continued unabated. Support has been provided to doctors and medical students in increasing numbers and our Medical Director, Dr Kym Jenkins and other staff have continued to present widely in accord with our objective to better educate doctors and medical students on the importance of health maintenance, illness prevention and especially early intervention. Details of our achievements of these objectives are contained in the Directors' Report incorporated in the 2009/2010 Annual Audited Accounts and in Dr Jenkins's separate report to this meeting.

In the lead up to the cessation of the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria (MPBV) (funder and 50% owner of VDHP), the Board of VDHP determined that transfer of MPBV's role and responsibilities to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) was in the best interest of the future of this service to doctors and medical students. The Board is pleased that this transfer is now in place (effective 1 July 2010) and that in accord with an undertaking given by the Victorian Minister for Health, AHPRA will continue to fund VDHP at least until June 2013, during which period AHPRA and VDHP will continue to work together to develop arrangements for the longer term provision of our services.

The transition process to this arrangement has certainly been challenging at times and I sincerely thank all those who have assisted in this, including the Minister for Health, the Hon. Daniel Andrews, senior personnel within the Department of Health (with specific mention of Ms Kim Sykes), many staff and office bearers of the MPBV (with specific mention of Dr Bob Adler, the previous President) and also the newly formed AHPRA.

Going forward, challenges remain. The VDHP since 2001 has offered a service to doctors that is unique within Australia, the value of which has been consistently recognised and appreciated not only by our participants, their families, work colleagues, employers and other referrers but also by the MPBV.

We do not have unrealistic expectations about the ease nor even the automatic appropriateness of extending this exact same model to all states of Australia but we do believe that there are many aspects of this model which will, over the next couple of years, become well appreciated and hopefully endorsed and implemented nationwide. VDHP will, in the next 12 months, be casting our

focus externally as well as internally to ensure that we have certainty that our current model (or similar) will have a future beyond the 3 year period of the current AHPRA funding commitment.

In the short term we remain uncertain as to the impact of the new “mandatory notification” requirements of *the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Victoria) Act 2009*. Interpretation of these requirements remains unclear and a major focus in the forthcoming year will be to seek to minimise the negative impact that this legislation may have on the willingness of doctors to seek early help for any mental problems, or drug or alcohol use disorders. Confidentiality for attending doctors is a vital aspect of our service; while at the same time VDHP does fully accept our legal obligations and the necessity to safeguard the public.

Thank you to my fellow directors for their commitment and contribution of their time and effort. Thank you to our marvellous staff, so enthusiastically lead by Dr Kym Jenkins and thank you to our constitutional members, the MPBV (now AHPRA) and AMA Victoria. We look forward to strengthening our working relationship with AMA Victoria to collaboratively build on our common objectives. And finally, I would especially like to thank Mr Richard Mullaly, the Victorian State Manager of AHPRA, for his support and assistance over the past months. As we move forward we believe that it is absolutely vital that we maintain and strengthen the mutual respect in VDHP’s relationship with the regulation authority.

Dr E Robyn Mason
Chair
Victorian Doctors’ Health Program