

Where to next?

I would like to thank the staff, members, directors and consultant GPs for their excellent contribution to achieving the program outcomes for 2008/9. We continue to aim to maintain our strong position as a provider of choice in delivering primary health care programs in the region.

During the next year we will be continuing our programs and support to general practice. It is also quite possible that we will be in the midst of considerable change. This change has been outlined in the Report of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission released this year. The Report - *A Healthier Future For All Australians* - indicates a new and expanded role for the GP Divisions as Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCOs).

At GSGPN we are keen to embrace the change and become part of a PHCO. Meetings with our regional colleagues have already commenced to enable us to evolve as a new entity in the next twelve to eighteen months. This new entity could involve merging with other GP networks and becoming a regional branch of a larger PHCO.

The detail on how divisions may change to become PHCOs is not articulated. Therefore, we believe that there may be an opportunity for GP Networks to influence some of the national implementation detail. Working with the change will offer a number of opportunities to better address the health needs of our residents in the Great Southern.

We are excited by the opportunity to work with other providers in the region to deliver a more comprehensive primary health care service. The changes might enable us to establish a "one-stop shop" providing a wide range of primary health services and to better fill the gaps in our current regional services.

Locally we have already begun this focus on a more comprehensive and coordinated primary health care service. We have been promoting enhanced multidisciplinary team care. The allied health professionals we employ have expanded their roles and responsibilities this year to provide a greater focus on improving patients' ability to self-manage their chronic conditions. Group treatment has seen some significant improvements in the health of our community.

We have also continued to work with other providers and plan to expand the number of organisations we assist or work with in the delivery of primary health care.

Change, however, also presents uncertainty and challenges for our board, members and staff. The Reform Commission Report indicates that the PHCO would be the fund holder and responsible for the primary health services within the region. Moving from an organisation established to support a provider (GPs and GP practices) to being an organisation responsible for the health outcomes of the community presents considerable challenges for us all. The 'client' of the GSGPN has been the GP and the GP practices since 1994. This has extended more recently to other health professionals working closely with GPs. The new direction would require a shift of focus, as our 'client' becomes the consumer of health care services.

In the future we would need to be governed by a community-based board with specific governance skills. This could ultimately see a reduction in GP Directors, and more community directors such as lawyers, business people and state/private health providers. The Board members would be selected with a range of skills related to good governance and their local knowledge and expertise.

The potential benefits for our organisation and the community include a broader funding base, stronger partnerships, with more comprehensive and integrated services designed and delivered locally.

Thus, we go into this new financial year ready to embrace and work with change to ensure that our region is well placed for the development of appropriate primary health care. Our strengths are our ability to plan and deliver with local knowledge, strong partnerships and an ability to lead best practice.

Mrs Suzanne Leavesley – Chief Executive Officer.