

2009 has been another busy and eventful year for our organisation. GSGPN returned another strong result this year, with total of \$4.4 million worth of services and programs delivered within our region for the 2008/2009 financial year. This compares favourably with similar sized divisions across WA and Australia.

As we continue to strive towards our organisational vision of “improving health outcomes within the Great Southern through General Practice”, GSGPN continues to provide a growing range of primary health services and programs within the Great Southern. GP focused programs such as More Allied Health Services, which provide dietetic and diabetic educator services to member practices have continued. GSGPN has also been successful in broadening its range of funding sources, by securing income from less traditional sources. A good example of this is our exciting Communities for Children (C for C) initiative, which has allowed us, roll out services to the 0 to 5 years age group across the region, aimed at improving outcomes for children in this critical age group. Through C for C, GSGPN was able to provide mobile early childhood services to small communities, and static “hubs” in the larger centres in the Great Southern. This innovative program, funded by the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) through a \$3.9 million grant, was scheduled to run over 4 years, ending in 2009. I am pleased to announce that the Commonwealth has found the Lower Great Southern Communities for Children initiative so successful, that GSGPN has been able to secure an additional \$2.775 million of funding to extend this program to June 2012. The focus will now be on vulnerable children between the ages of 0 and 12 years and their families.

Other highlights of this year include the successful completion of our Great Southern Managed Health Network (GSMHN). This initiative was funded through a \$1.8 million Commonwealth Government “Health Connect” grant, and was delivered with our project partner the University of Western Australia. The project included the delivery of a secure medical messaging platform called “MMEx”, which has since gained uptake far beyond the Great Southern. At the time of writing, MMEx is delivering a steady volume of secure electronic messaging between our member GP surgeries, Regional Hospitals and local allied health professionals. This has gone a long way to reduce the onerous scanning of paper based correspondence into GP member’s electronic patient records. MMEx is currently being adopted by the Health Department of Western Australia on a trial basis, where it is envisaged to improve communications between community based primary health providers and hospitals. The initiative was sufficiently successful, that earlier this year GSMHN was the focus of a visit by an OECD delegation studying how to improve the efficiency of electronic communications in health care systems.

2009 has also seen the successful roll out of the GSGPN practice equipment library initiative, which enabled GP members to access network funded equipment for the GP surgeries. This was a popular program, with 55 medical members accessing over \$38,000 worth of medical equipment such as printers and dermatoscopes for their practices. Initiatives such as the practice equipment library, underline our organisation’s commitment to serving and supporting you, our members.

This year, has of course, also brought momentous developments on a global and national level. We witnessed the unfolding of the great global financial crisis, that resulted in significant impact Australia-wide. While this “great recession” to date has had limited effect on GSGPN’s operations, it did result in a heightened government focus on reining in Australia’s steadily escalating healthcare costs.

Already there have been significant national level consultations on how to bring greater efficiencies to the nation’s health services. The Government’s National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission projects, that in the coming 25 years, spending on health and aged

care will balloon from the current \$100 billion per annum to almost \$250 billion. This represents 12.4% of Australia's GDP. Governments are coming to the realisation that the current practice of directing much of health care spending towards large and expensive tertiary hospital services is not only unsustainable, but also inefficient.

Over recent months we have seen the Federal government signal a renewed focus on primary health and prevention, as the preferred strategy to meet the health system's looming challenges of increased incidence of chronic diseases (such as diabetes) and an increase in the overall ageing population. This means that general practice and the Network movement will play a pivotal role in the coming health care "revolution", that will be aimed at keeping our ageing population healthy and well enough to stay out of expensive hospital and institutional care.

To this end the Federal government has foreshadowed the Australian network movement transitioning to a group of Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCO). These PHCOs are envisaged to be patient focused entities that will harness the combined resources of local allied health care providers, with the GP continuing to play a central, coordinating role. While final details on the proposed PHCOs are not as yet available, they are expected to be significantly larger in population base than current existing divisions of general practice. 25 PHCOs could potentially replace the current 110 Australian GP networks. Thus significant changes may well be in store for GSGPN in the medium term, proving the old maxim that that only thing that is certain is change.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to our CEO, Suzie Leavesley and her GSGPN team, for all their hard work, commitment and dedication throughout the year. GSGPN' success is measured by the outstanding contributions from our talented team of managers, clinicians and support personnel. Well done team!

In closing, I would also like to thank our General Practice and Allied Health membership for their continued support over the past year.

GSPGN's mission is to serve and support our General Practitioner and Allied Health members. In order to fulfil this mission we do require support and input from our membership. We frequently look for guidance and feedback from members on how we can serve them better and how to improve our programs. We also require members to give their expert input at meetings, committees and at the board level, so that the GSGPN can continue to advance its goals of serving its members and improving health outcomes in our community. GSGPN thus looks forward to ongoing engagement and involvement from its committed membership base. Finally, on behalf of GSGPN, allow me to wish you and your family a happy and safe festive season. With kind regards,

Dr David Tadj
GSPGN Chairman