

Submission to Education and Health Standing Committee

Review of WA's current and future hospital and community Health Care Services

The Department of Health's [DoH] current strategic plan (2005-2010) sets out a range of strategic directions to improve the health of our hospitals, workforce and community. Among other strategic initiatives, the plan describes a commitment to workforce development and training. In addition to developing health infrastructure and partnerships, maintaining and improving the skill level of health workers benefits workplace culture, retention in the workforce, uptake of new technologies and treatment guidelines, as well as improving the achievement of optimal client outcomes.

The *Graduate Diploma in Neurological Rehabilitation* (GDNR) is a post graduate program offered within the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Science at The University of Western Australia to physiotherapists who are involved in the rehabilitation of people with neurological conditions, such as stroke, traumatic brain injury, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and Cerebral Palsy. The GDNR provides intensive skills training in neurological physiotherapy, in addition to an overview of the role of the multi disciplinary team in the provision of efficacious, cost effective, client focussed neurological rehabilitation.

Importantly, in addition to a period of acute care and rehabilitation following onset of central nervous system injury, most of these clients require long term, periodic management, in order to maintain optimal level of functioning. Acquired and degenerative neurological conditions can involve extremely complex presentations, requiring skilled assessment and treatment. Services to these clients are provided predominantly within the public health system, including ambulatory care settings. As individuals with neurological disabilities are more likely than in previous decades to be residing in the community, and are living longer, there is a need to ensure provision of specialised neurological services across the WA community, particularly in regional centres, to reduce reliance upon tertiary hospitals. Consequently, future planning of health services will require an expansion of existing rehabilitation services both in the metropolitan area and in centres remote from Perth. Programs such as the GDNR, which upskill physiotherapists to provide best practice neurological rehabilitation to their clients, and leadership and mentoring to less experienced physiotherapy colleagues and undergraduate students, are critical to the long term success of the Health Plan for WA.

Since the commencement of the GDNR program, the majority of local graduates have assumed more senior appointments in neurological and related services in the major tertiary hospitals as well as academic settings in WA, demonstrating the initial effectiveness of this program.

To support development of the workforce in the area of neurological physiotherapy, the DoH committed to the provision of six part fee scholarships per year for three years (2007-2010) to support public sector physiotherapists undertaking the GDNR. In the first two years of the program, a modest investment of approx \$30,000 has contributed to the uptake of this post graduate training program [at a cost of approximately \$3,000 per graduate]. Regrettably, continuation of this funding is unable to be guaranteed for 2010

and beyond. It is suggested that ongoing development of specialised neurological physiotherapy services in WA will be considerably assisted through the continuation of this highly cost effective scholarship scheme.

From 2010, the GDNR program will be expanded to provide the only post-graduate study opportunity in paediatric neurological physiotherapy in the whole of Australia. This is another area of significant need for specialist training and development, which will be considerably enhanced by provision of study support programs to facilitate uptake by physiotherapists working within the public health system, particularly in community settings.

The fee support scholarship initiative to assist DoH employed physiotherapists to undertake the GDNR at the University of WA has the unreserved support of the Vice-Chancellor Professor Alan Robson, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Science Professor Ian Puddey, along with our senior medical colleagues: Clinical Professor Peter Silbert, State Director of Neurology, and Clinical Professor Bryant Stokes, former CMO, Health Department WA. The continuation of this funding support will benefit health service provision and assist in maintaining a highly skilled and committed physiotherapy workforce within neurological services in WA.

For further information, please contact:

Assoc. Professor Barby Singer, PT PhD
Centre for Musculoskeletal Studies
School of Surgery
The University of Western Australia
Level 2, Medical Research Building,
Royal Perth Hospital
Rear 50 Murray Street, WA 6000
Phone +61 8 9224 0229
Fax +61 8 9224 0204
www.cms.uwa.edu.au