

The Victorian Medical Women's Society

Founded 1896

Newsletter Volume 3, Issue 1

February 2005

President's Report



Desiree Yap & Jan Coles

2004 was a busy year for VMWS. We started the year with a recruitment drive that involved a mail-out to all registered female medical practitioners in Victoria, now around 3,800 women. As a

result of this, we almost doubled our membership, but unfortunately we still only represent about 5% of Victorian Medical Women (in comparison, Sweden has 30% membership). We are still trying to think of ways to increase our profile, our relevance and thereby hopefully our membership. We would appreciate suggestions as to how to achieve this from all of you, but it would also be helpful if you would all just keep badgering your friends and colleagues to join! Membership forms are circulated in all our newsletters, so please pass them on! We have also continued with trying to find non-drug-company Sponsorship. Anyone with any suitable contacts or ideas is welcome to contact us with details. Nonetheless, as a consequence of our increased membership and sponsorship, our treasurer is a happy woman!

You were up-dated last year on our web-site development. Our Vice-President Dr. Deb Colville has been continuing to chip away at its development in her spare time. Problems with email continue, but we are exploring different solutions at the moment so please bear with us.

One initiative the committee has been trying to develop is that of obtaining funding for projects relevant to our charter which aims to further the professional development of medical women by education, research and improvement of professional opportunities, and to promote the health and welfare of all Australians, particularly women and children. Some of you may be aware, that last year AFMW secured two grants from the Office for the Status of Women to explore Gender Mainstreaming and Training. The report was published in June 2004. This year AFMW secured \$100,000 for 2 projects this year, and we take this as encouragement. Victoria provided a significant contribution to this effort, and we now intend to seek funding for our own projects. We have held a preliminary meeting with the Department of Human Services. In order to progress this, but the committee has suggested we create the committee position of "Research Liaison". Dr. Jan Coles has been nominated to this inaugural position for 2005.

Another suggestion to further this aim of being more proactive about our charter has been to try and meet our members needs better. To be more proactive requires planning, funding and implementation. This all takes time for committee members already stretched across many

duties and responsibilities. As such, we think we need a Strategic Directions portfolio and the development of a business plan. So far, Dr. Lye Pheng Fong has been nominated to this position. For this year we have also included nominations for Social Secretary/ies as organising the dinner functions really is a job all on its own. Dr Monica Pahuja and Dr Ranjani Ratnam have been nominated for this, but the option remains to have two to further divide the labour.

Other activities are underway for the committee. One is the adoption of a VMWS logo. We are still examining drafts but should hopefully have one next year. We also need to mention that Dr. Merrilyn Murnane has arranged for the VMWS archives to be stored at the State Library. To date she has been carefully storing them. We have even been advised to keep all the financials archived as well to assist future historians!

Social functions in 2004 have included the Cocktail Network Evening, which was extremely well attended, and the very interesting Dinner in Space. We also held an education evening, 'From Quackery to CPD', in September and the AGM. We hope to iron out some of the difficulties we have had with notifying the membership of these events in 2005 by a combination of continuing the newsletter notification in a timely manner and hopefully by utilising e-mail more. We have spent a lot of our resources trying to embed the membership into a suitable electronic format to facilitate communication better. We think we will reap the benefits of this very time-consuming effort in 2005.

Unfortunately for 2004 the Medical Student Prize has not been awarded. You may remember that this was an initiative to raise the profile of the VMWS amongst students and to encourage students to enter into research in women's health plus provide financial assistance to students. The Prize is to be for an essay or paper on an issue relevant to women's health. We are hoping to be able to award this next year.

Issues relevant to 2005 include a continued focus on recruitment, and as mentioned the Strategic and Business Planning with exploration of the needs of our membership. During the course of our Newsletter topics this year, we had feedback from a member concerning our position on Reproductive Health issues. This prompted us to consider a review of the issue. We hope to be able to present some views through the newsletter, and given the recent profile abortion has recently received in the press, it would seem perhaps even more timely.

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International and Local Perspectives on Lesbian Health Care



Dr Ruth McNair was the speaker at our 2004 AGM, addressing the topic above. She is a general practitioner who is also a lecturer at the University of Melbourne. Lesbian health is a strong focus in her clinical and research work.

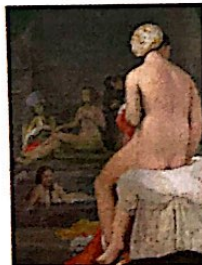
Non-heterosexual women make up between 2.6 and 15.1% of all women in Australia (depending on the defining criteria), and often don't publicly identify themselves as such. Their health needs are different to that of men and heterosexual women, with research showing particular difficulties around mental health, substance use, sexual health, differing cancer risk profiles, and violence. Discrimination is often an underlying theme in these health risks. Dr McNair highlighted the fact that many of us knowingly or unknowingly have lesbians as our patients and their experience of mainstream medical practitioners is often negative.



To further her clinical and research interest, she recently visited a number of international centres focusing on non-heterosexual

women's health care provision. These included centres in Scotland (The Sandyford Initiative, Glasgow, and a trial multi-site project run in 2004 by the Scotland NHS). She then continued on to the United States. Centres include the Greenwich Village LGBT – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender - Community Centre (the second largest lesbian health care centre in the world), and a Bronx based service run on a volunteer basis by a New York medical student. On the west coast she visited the San Francisco based Lyon-Martin Women's Health Service.

Common themes existed between each service that Dr McNair discussed. Often, services for all 'non-heterosexual' groups were combined, reflecting common problems and solutions. Funding seemed universally precarious. There was a strong focus on public health initiatives, and most also contributed in other ways to community development and support. They all saw themselves as being advocates for this community within the broader health care system. Interestingly, their all inclusive approach to health care provision saw their services being used by large numbers of heterosexual women who preferred these services to the mainstream.



In Australia, there is increasing recognition of lesbian health needs. Several medical groups (e.g. AMA, RACGP) have health policies, and law is gradually catching up to ensure greater social equity. There are, however, significant silences from many medical groups

and legislation is still notoriously variable in legal right. Research is stymied by poor funding, poor publication opportunities and lack of broad population based statistics. Medical training is minimal and evidence based practice is limited. Dr McNair outlined several ways to improve our current practice, including the importance of communication and developing cultural competency. Conveniently, she has several publications available to help with this!

We would like to thank Dr McNair for a very impressive presentation on a neglected group of our patients. Dr McNair is able to be contacted through the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne if anyone would like to pursue this area further.

AGM Reports

Secretary's Report



In this last year we have widened the committee to include two student representatives, a further general representative, and a newsletter editor. We have applied unsuccessfully for a grant for research from the DHS this year, but have reason to believe that we stand a good chance of getting funding for a mentoring project next year. The National Council of Women continues to provide us with an avenue of access to other women's groups and to government bodies. Our involvement in the Victorian AMA continues. Our previous representative, Dr Kate Duncan, is now in the Executive, giving us the chance to replace her council position membership with another representative, Dr Deborah Amott.

Kate has paid particular attention to the issue of medical indemnity, keeping the AMA focused on its impact on women doctors. We continue close ties with the AFMW, and congratulate Dr Gabrielle Casper on her elevation to the presidency of the Medical Women's International Association. I am standing down from this position, with Ms Sarah Garner nominated as Secretary for the coming year.

Treasurer's Report

In general, the balance is healthy:

Funds (30/6/03):	11,092.39
Surplus (30/6/04):	3266.31
Balance at 30/6/04:	14,358.70



Increased membership and sponsorship has given us the opportunity to discount events for our members, and keep our fees steady in the coming year. I recommend that the figures be accepted, that we retain our current auditors and that subscriptions remain set at \$60 (full) and \$20 (student) for the coming year. (Motion moved and accepted at the AGM).

Please note the list of the new committee on page 3.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami: it's Impact on Women and Children

All of us are aware of the recent disaster, but reports are now beginning to emerge of its particular impact on women and children in the affected countries. Below are a range of issues that are being highlighted, and a list of websites that provide further information and the opportunity to donate to support those affected.

Pregnancy: The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that there are 150,000 pregnant women in the tsunami-affected areas of Asia and that 50,000 of these women will give birth within three months. The United Nations Population Fund is allocating \$3 million for emergency aid and obstetrical supplies. It is sending assessment teams to all areas and distributing "safe-birth kits". They are also distributing basic female hygiene kits to non-pregnant women.



Violence: Reuters news service reports that vulnerable women and girls are being robbed, kidnapped and raped in the chaos, particularly in Sri Lanka. This is allegedly occurring both within and outside of refugee accommodation.



The Fight for Survival: Initial assessment of the death toll also suggests that more women and children died than men when the wave hit. The reason is unclear, but it is postulated that men are stronger and better swimmers. Given their physical inequalities, women and girls are less able to carry large bags

of food, less able to fight for meagre supplies. Men are also more likely to gain employment in the immediate reconstruction and clean-up stages than women.

Social Reconstruction: women are often the ones who are taking care of everyone else in the recovery. Many suddenly find themselves the heads of households. Reconstructing communities where many traditional (male) breadwinners are now dead will be difficult, especially in areas where women are poorly educated and face barriers to employment. In addition, those areas which have lost their women and their social networks will struggle to rebuild their communities. UNIFEM makes the point that in many of the affected areas, women have been maintaining 'mutual-aid networks' in the face of civic upheaval (e.g. Aceh, Sri Lanka) already. Supporting them to re-establish these will be an important step in social rehabilitation.



Child Exploitation: Reports are starting to emerge about displaced and orphaned children

being recruited by Tamil Tigers as child soldiers (Human Rights Watch), kidnapped to be sold into the sex trade (IWDA), and illegally adopted (Unicef). Well meaning offers from overseas people to legally adopt orphans may potentially add the trauma of being uprooted from their homeland and culture to the initial trauma of the event itself (Unicef).

Internet

www.planetwire.org/details/5170

www.redlandsdailyfacts.com

www.unfpa.org

www.kaleo.org/vnews

www.wire.org.au/womens_info

www.unicef.org

www.unifem.undp.org

www.iwda.org.au



Business and Professional Women Australia

www.bpw.com.au

"BPW is an international organisation founded in 1919, on the conviction that no form of equality could endure, or prove effective once achieved, unless it had a sound economic base. BPW encourages women to become well informed and active at local, national and international levels. BPW works to raise the status of women and cooperate with women in other countries to encourage international understanding.

BPW is representative of women from all walks of life including those who work in the professions, as managers, employees, employers and business owners. A multigenerational organisation, membership includes women who work in the public and private sectors, in micro business through to the corporate, professional and political fields. It provides networking locally, nationally and internationally, stimulating speakers providing information, education and training, mentoring and a forum for exchange of information and debate in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere."

New Committee Members

President:	Dr Desiree Yap
VP/AFMW Rep:	Dr Deborah Colville
Secretary:	Dr Sarah Garner
Treasurer:	Dr Sue Piper
NCW Rep:	Dr Margaret Jenson
Melb Uni Student Rep:	Ms Kristen Cornell
Strategic Directions:	Dr Lye Pheng Fong
Social Secretaries:	Dr Ranjani Ratnam Dr Monica Pahuja
Newsletter Editor:	Dr Deborah Amott
Research Liason	Dr Jan Coles

Wonderful Medical Women:

Dr Rosalind Terry

Rosalind Terry spent her childhood in Geelong until age 10, then moved to Melbourne. Coming from a business family, "no one went to University, certainly not a girl", but equally it was seen as a waste to not use her Commonwealth Scholarship. She thus completed a BSc (Hons) in Micro/Biochem and enjoyed 3 years at University Women's' College. A tendency to wander asserted itself early, with Dr Terry then setting off for four years in the US after a year of research at Melbourne Uni.

She then came back to Tasmania working in the state vet lab until she was accepted into Medicine back at Melb Uni. Initially supporting herself during the course at RMH in the lab, she continued there as resident and HMO. She became the first female surgical registrar at St Vincent's Sydney in 1976, and recounts a chilly welcome from the majority of surgeons (but wonderful support from the nuns).



During the latter half of 1977 she was posted on rotation to PNG, loved everything about the work and the country and ended up staying 10 years, marrying and not completing her second part exam. "Work was almost never ending; nearly everything was an emergency, lots of surgery, obstetrics, and tropical medicine, traveling to remote areas, doing clinics on verandahs or under the wing of a plane, a great experience. After 10 years and in my late 40's the frequent night time trips and very full days found me rather tired so off to Norfolk Island for two years to debrief".

A self-appointed "sabbatical" year followed, then back to Melbourne in 1990. She "fell" into doing sessions in the ED at The Alfred and found the field that was to be her new career. In late 1993 she was appointed inaugural Director: Urgent Medical Care at the new Werribee Mercy Hospital. "Setting up a new hospital and department was another great, and enjoyable, challenge but after 4 + years found me rather worn out so thought I would have a break. Before I had even left The Alfred phoned me and asked if I would come back and relieve for 3 months - and I'm still there".

As the only female of 13 consultants in the department I feel strongly about being a presence and mentor for the female HMOs and registrars, and thoroughly enjoy my work, so compromise my life by working 2/3 time allowing time to enjoy my farm in the Otways and my daughter and 2 grandsons who live near there. My husband having died earlier this year after a long period of ill health following a car accident in 2001 so am currently just enjoying work, the farm and reassessing my life and realise how serendipitous it has all been".



Women as peacemakers: from victims to re-builders of society

While the plight of women in war often gets close media attention, what is often overlooked is the vital role played by them in negotiating peace and rebuilding societies.



While too often reporting of women in conflict situations shows them as powerless victims, the reality, often glossed over, is that in post conflict situations women are in the forefront when it comes to negotiating and building peace. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has pointed out, "Women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it."

Women as torchbearers of peace are making a difference in hot spots of every region of the world. Palestinian and Israeli women have joined forces and work together as advocates for peace. In Nepal, women who were victims of violence are seeking representation in peace talks between the government and Maoist rebels. Women's Peace Caravans venture into the most treacherous conflict-ridden interiors of Colombia to protest against the civil war and negotiate with the guerillas. Throwing themselves into peace processes with enormous courage and determination, women in politics, through their often unseen and unsung work, are bringing peace to many troubled countries...

African leaders pledge to eradicate polio as disease spreads again



With African children now making up 85 per cent of the world's poliomyelitis cases after groups in Nigeria forced suspension of an inoculation campaign, African health ministers from eight countries pledged today to plan massive immunization campaigns against the paralyzing disease and to increase surveillance, the United Nations health agency said today. The number of polio cases in Africa doubled since some groups in northern Nigeria claimed in August 2003 that the vaccine being used would render girls infertile.

Cases in Africa now number 1,037, according to WHO, UNICEF, the US CDC and Rotary International, which convened the meeting in Geneva. Although the area resumed an anti-polio policy in July 2004, the virus was shown by genetic tests to have spread into countries with low immunization because of civil wars, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan, and to their neighbours including Burkina Faso and Chad.



Upcoming Events and Awards

6th March, 2005

National Council of Women (Vic) IWD Function

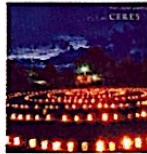
Thurs 10th March: 10.00-12.00pm \$15
Speaker, musical entertainment and morning tea.
NAB, Docklands Building
Ground Floor, 800 Bourke Street, Melbourne
RSVP: PO Box 18186, GPO Collins St East, 8003

The Inaugural Dame Phyllis Frost Award

"Delegates of Members and Associate Members of the National Council of Women Victoria are invited to nominate a woman who has made a significant contribution to the enhancement of the status of women in Victoria for this prestigious award. It is made for the first time in 2005 and will be presented for the first time at the NCWV International Women's Day function. Nominees do not need to be a member of the NCWV, but do need to have demonstrated a long term commitment to and made a significant contribution to the enhancement of the status of women in Victoria. Nominations due by 3rd February, 2005.

Please contact the Secretariat for nomination forms.

IWD Fair: CERES
8 Lee St, East Brunswick
www.vicnet.net.au/~wfair



Come and celebrate International Women's Day (6/3) with your friends and family at the CERES Environmental Park in East Brunswick. In 2004 the collective organised a similar women's day fair at CERES, where over one thousand people attended and helped to make the day a terrific success. Bands, Singers, Dancers, Poets, Circus Acts and Guest Speakers will be performing. Yummy food and drink will be available, as well as a variety of craft and clothing stalls. If you would like to be involved in the fair or have something to contribute, please do not hesitate to contact us via email. In the meantime, why not pop along to our website to see the latest news on the preparations for the fair, and see who will be performing!

To check on other events, check www.isis.aust.com/iwd/

New MWIA Resolutions: Tokyo 2004

The congress's resolution is now on the website of the MWIA for all to peruse:

www.mwia.net/Resolutions2004.pdf



Promoting Professional Women Conference and Mentoring Program



5th April 2005: Sofitel
Wentworth Hotel, Sydney
Leading professional women
such as Wendy McCarthy AO
and Elizabeth Bryan AM, will

share their insights into women's careers. Mentoring expert Imogen Wareing will educate you about mentoring, how it can work for you and the 3-month group-mentoring program that you will then experience:
www.apesma.asn.au/women/conference/2005

Health and Experiences of Violence among Young Women



OFW commissioned Women's Health Australia to undertake an analysis of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health data to explore the impact of violence on young women's reproductive health.

The study found that violence against women is associated with serious reproductive outcomes including unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, high rates of abortion, low birth-weight and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection. Violence against women also impacts on their general physical and mental health.

www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/news/index.htm

Rewarding Australians Striving for Excellence: Churchill Fellowships



The aim of the Churchill Trust is to give opportunity, by the provision of financial support, to enable Australians from all walks of life who, having exhausted opportunities within

Australia, desire to further their search for excellence overseas. There are no prescribed qualifications, academic or otherwise, for the award of most Churchill Fellowships. Merit is the primary test, whether based on past achievements or demonstrated ability for future achievement in any walk of life. Benefit to Australia is a significant factor.

Applications close February 28th

www.churchilltrust.com.au

President Report: cont from p1

One issue that has been brought to my attention in the last couple of weeks is the recently published RACGP Professional Peer Support Program Committee: Review of the Literature 'A Conspiracy of Silence' which puts part-time female GP's as the medical group most at risk of suicide. A copy of this document will be available through the secretariat. I think this finding has surprised most of us and I think VMWS has a responsibility to try and do something about this.

The draft plan for the 2005 meetings is attached to this newsletter – please note our first event, a Yum Cha lunch in March. We are even starting to think of 2006 and wondered whether we should try to organise a joint VMWS dinner with the Australian Women Lawyers. We are even wondering if we could persuade Amanda Sinclair to speak...

And it's with great pleasure that I'd like to make the life-membership awards. In gratitude for years of service to VMWS, we are delighted to present Nancy Nicholas and Pat Scrivenor with life-memberships.

I look forward to meeting you all again in 2005!

Dr Desiree Yap

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Having trouble e-mailing us?

Try:

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NB: vmws is in lower case
Please report difficulties to
desireey@ozemail.com.au

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF MEDICAL WOMEN

www.afmw.org.au

MEDICAL WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

E-mail: mwia@aol.com

Website: <http://www.mwia.net>

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This is a Free service to all Members and Associates of VMWS

The Victorian Medical Women's Society
welcomes you to

A New Year Yum Cha Lunch



Sunday, 20th March
13.30 PM

Shark Fin Inn
50 Little Bourke Street
Melbourne

An informal get-together to catch up after the
holiday break and launch into the new year.

Family and non-members welcome!

Adults: \$25

Children (<10): \$12.50

RSVP: 9419 ~~4877~~ by March 10th
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