

The Victorian Medical Women's Society

Founded 1896

Newsletter Volume 3, Issue 2

May 2005

President's Report



Welcome all to the second newsletter of the year. We on the committee have been rather busy trying to modernize our processes to the point where the organization can be managed using an internet-based system. This will have a lot of benefits for internet-savvy members and committee members, as well as cost savings in the

administrative department (we hope!); although for communications with the non-electronically savvy members, our traditional paper-based methods will still also be employed.

On the 2nd April 2005 AFMW held a strategic planning weekend in Sydney. Dr. Deb Colville and I attended this. There are a number of important news items that have arisen from this meeting.

Firstly, by now most of you should be aware of the great news that Australian Dr. Gabrielle Casper is currently the MWIA President. She is also still acting as AFMW President, as the AFMW Committee was loath to let her step down given all the changes we hope to implement over the coming months. More of that later.

Secondly, there is the not-so-good news that our sister organizations in South Australia and Tasmania are having trouble keeping themselves operational. Tasmania does not have a functioning committee, and South Australia is on the cusp of collapsing for similar reasons. It seems incredible that we can simultaneously be providing the MWIA President and having Societies disappear, and all whilst there is the highest number of medical women graduating ever. Even Victoria's membership base is only a small proportion of the now around 4,000 medical women statewide – and we are hoping to at least maintain the same membership as last year. This all begs the question of how relevant the organization is to younger medical women, and what we should be doing to keep the organization going if we think it is worthwhile. If you have any views or think you can help, please contact the secretariat.

This brings me to the news about our communications. Our website is once again lurching forward. We have a new e-mail: vic@afmw.org.au. People with ideas, feedback or offers of help can contact us either on this address or by contacting a committee member personally.

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Leadership for Medical Women

Date: weekend, late Oct-early Nov
Cost: \$900 (funding sources available)
Venue: TBA (central Melbourne)

A two day course designed to develop leadership skills in female doctors, facilitated by Professor Deborah Saltman, Professor of General Practice, University of Sydney. Specifically designed for female medical practitioners at all levels of their careers.

The course covers:

- Different leadership styles and their application to different situations
- Methods of dealing with conflict within professional settings
- Tricks to develop your career
- Task specific training (meeting protocols, PowerPoint etc)

CME/CPD points available.

For expressions of interest, please email Deborah Amott at debbie@amott.com

Medical Student Research/Essay Prize

The role of mentoring in the medical profession.



Open to current Victorian medical student members or those who completed their research during the student days.

For expressions of interest, please email Deborah Amott at debbie@amott.com

Wonderful Medical Women Australia Day Honours



Dr Jillian Sewell: Member of the Order of Australia AM: Service to paediatrics and improvements in children's health care as a consultant, administrator and educator.

Dr Sewell is Deputy Director of the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, and Senior Fellow, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne. Her clinical interests are in developmental and behavioural paediatrics. She is President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and immediate past President of the Paediatrics and Child Health Division of the College. Dr Sewell is Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Institute of Clinical Studies, and sits on the Victorian Quality Council.

Associate Professor Alison Mary Street: Officer of the Order of Australia (AO)

for service to medicine particularly in the field of haematology, and as a significant contributor to the management of congenital bleeding disorders and minimisation of transfusion transmitted infection.



Professor Street is the recent head of the Department of Haematology at The Alfred and presently head of the Haemophilia Centre and Haemostasis/Thrombosis Unit. She has served as president, chair and member of many medical boards and committees including the Haematology Society of Australia, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service and the World Federation of Haemophilia.



Dr Sandra Hacker Officer of the Order of Australia (AO): for service to medicine, particularly in the field of psychiatry, and to excellence in professional education and promotion of the highest standards of health care in Australia.

Dr Sandra Hacker is a consultant psychiatrist at The Alfred and Eastern Health. She has taken particular interest in heart and lung transplant patients, leading the multidisciplinary team over many years. She is the chair, or a board member, of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Mental Health Research Institute, Victorian Doctors Health Program and the Victorian Medical Benevolent Association. She has also had prominent roles in the AMA and the RANZCP.

Dr Aileen Connon- Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to public health and medicine.

Dr Connon is a past president of the AFMW, and is trained as an obstetrician and gynaecologist and, more recently, as a social anthropologist. She currently works in South Australia.

Attention Medical Students Australian Youth at the UN



Applications open soon for one young Australian to become part of the 2006 Australian Delegation to the United Nations as Australia's Youth Representative.

The successful applicant will work in the Australian Mission to the UN. That work will include playing an important role in providing youth opinion on resolutions in the General Assembly. The Youth Representative will also work with fellow Youth Representatives from other Member States to advance the youth agenda and meet with numerous UN staff to formulate new projects for young people around the world. The experience will also offer the successful applicant the opportunity to learn a great deal by working closely with Australian diplomatic personnel.



The United Nations Youth Association of Australia (UNYA) is responsible for selecting the successful candidate, who will be supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. National President of UNYA, Mr Travers McLeod, says that the Association is seeking applicants with a sound knowledge of international issues, strong leadership skills and experience in representing youth opinion.

Expressions of interest for the position (which close in November), as well as further information, may be accessed via the website: www.unya.asn.au

Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault

An interactive educational module for doctors

Medical professionals who have good quality training are well-placed to respond appropriately to adults who disclose sexual assault, thus providing the opportunity to mitigate longer-term health impacts for these people.



Women who experience sexual assault look to their doctors to recognize the effects of sexual assault, raise the issue with their patients, and respond in a supportive way to address the health effects – just as their doctors would respond with a supportive and professional manner to any other health issue. To order:

www.ranzcog.edu.au/sexual-assault-module.shtml

Abortion: where do our sister organizations stand?

Abortion is an issue back in the spotlight. The VMWS does not have a specific locally developed policy on abortion. However, our international organization, the MWIA, has ratified several resolutions at previous congresses, and the United Nations has issued a position statement on the issue. For those of you who are interested, they are listed below:

MWIA Resolutions about Abortion



1980.1: Every individual woman in every country should have the right to decide for herself if she wishes not to become pregnant. Reliable information and safe means to prevent pregnancy would be at her disposal.

1992.14: MWIA recognizes that termination of pregnancy is requested by some women. Where that procedure is culturally acceptable, MWIA believe women should be offered the method that is safest, least invasive and most acceptable to them.

1995.18: The Medical Women's International Association believes that an effective way to reduce the number of abortions is to prevent unwanted pregnancies by provision of appropriate family planning services and family life planning.

The Medical Women's International Association urges that –

1. Safe legal abortion services are available, affordable and accessible in all family planning services.
2. In worldwide promotion of women's health safe abortion services are seen as an important issue. Women should be encouraged to take leadership in advocating the legal and other changes, which may be required.



What is the United Nations stand on the issue of abortion?

The United Nations does not promote abortion as a method of family planning. According to the UN, the legal status of abortion is the sovereign right of each nation. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the United Nations main organization for population and reproductive health issues. Most of its assistance to countries is provided in the area of reproductive health services, including family planning and information. These services are unquestionably the most effective means of preventing abortions. To eliminate the need for abortions is UNFPA's goal. We all know that most abortions can be prevented through quality family planning, but unfortunately contraceptive failure sometimes occurs resulting in unwanted pregnancy. Therefore, women will continue to

seek abortion services -- this is a social reality. According to the UN, whether or not abortion is legal in a country should not determine whether a woman receives health assistance for abortion related complications.

Facts about maternal health and abortion:

- Some 99 per cent of the estimated 585,000 maternal deaths worldwide annually occur in poorer countries. Of these deaths, 13 per cent are a result of complications from unsafe abortions.
- More women resort to abortion where family planning services and sex education are poor.
- Restrictive abortion laws do not prevent abortion but force women to seek illegal and usually unsafe abortions. In Latin America, where abortion is almost completely illegal, the rate is between 30 to 60 per 1,000. In the Netherlands, with Europe's most liberal abortion law, only five out of 1,000 women opt for abortion. The average of Western Europe is 14 abortions per 1,000 women.
- Of the estimated 45 million abortions worldwide annually, only 25 million are legal. At least 70,000 women die each year as a consequence of unsafe abortion, and millions more suffer severe health problems.
- Unsafe abortions account for some 25 - 50 per cent of maternal deaths in refugee situations.

FIGURE 4 Deaths from Unsafe Abortion



Source: World Health Organization, Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood Programme Centre, unpublished estimates.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt, stated the following about the issue of abortion: "The status of a country's population policy, including the legal status of abortions, is the sovereign right of each nation. Unsafe abortion is a serious public health concern. Prevention of abortion and management of complications from abortions should be part of reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health programmes. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and every attempt should be made to eliminate the need for abortion."



www.mwia.net
www.un.org
www.unfpa.org

Women Speak to State Government via the Office of Women's Policy Website

The Victorian Office of Women's Policy has launched its website:

www.women.vic.gov.au. The website is both an information source and an interactive tool allowing Victorian women the chance to engage with government to share their thoughts and views on issues affecting them.



Features of the website include a sign up member section entitled "our on-line community". Members of the site will be informed of the upcoming projects, programs and events from the Office of Women's Policy and government relevant to women.

"Women Speak to Government" is a new on-line consultation feature. Members of the on-line community can be part of this regular consultation and be notified of surveys to gauge their views on issues such as health, child care, financial security and more. Results from these surveys will assist the Office of Women's Policy to understand how key issues affect you.

Women's Community Leadership Grants

The Women's Community Leadership Grants provide funding to organisations, networks, partnerships and individuals to implement projects that will advance the interests of women's leadership in their



communities. Under the program individual women and groups can apply for up to \$2000 and \$5000. Applications will close by September 2005. For further information about these grants and other grant programs from the Department for Victorian Communities visit www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au

Women on Boards Seminars

The Women on Board seminars were held across Victoria during September, October and November. The seminars were designed to help women take the next step – whether it's to join a board for the first time or pursue a chair position. All participants received a resource kit containing fact sheets and helpful advice for women interested in government board and committee appointments. These fact sheets are also available on the website. They cover:

GETTING ON: What you need to know and do before joining a Board

BEING ON: Understanding your Board and how it works

GETTING MORE WOMEN ON:

Passing the torch to others

MOVING ON: Exiting your Board role with grace



Upcoming Events

Got something to say about the Queen Victoria Women's Hospital?



QVWC is collecting stories about the Queen Victoria Women's Hospital. Whether you worked there, gave birth there, visited relatives there, or joined the campaigns to save part of it for the future – if you have a story to tell, please tell us.

If you would like your story to go on our website please email your story to us, including your name and contact details. We'll publish it on the website and/or archive it for the future. info@qvwc.org.au

Preparing for pregnancy information nights

The Childbirth Education department at Royal Women's Hospital is conducting a pilot program of information nights for women preparing for pregnancy. All Childbirth Education programs are free to public patients, but bookings are essential.

Dates: Wednesdays 27 April; 22 June; 24 August; 26 October 2005
Time: 7.30 - 9.30pm

Place: Royal Women's Hospital, Physiotherapy Department, Basement Level, 132 Grattan Street, Carlton
For more information, or to make a booking, phone (03) 9344 2244



Women with disabilities - advocacy information service



Expressions of interest are sought from women with skills in information management, design and application of web based information systems, and experience of disability, to develop a statewide advocacy information service for women with disabilities.

The proposed service will make use of innovative information systems and technology to provide current, accessible information and advocacy to women with disabilities. This will involve the creation, development and maintenance of information systems, including web based systems. **A copy of the project brief, including details on lodgement of an expression of interest, is available via www.whv.org.au**

Victorian Women's Honour Roll

The Victorian Honour Roll of Women recognises the achievements and contributions Victorian women have made to their communities and to the lives of others. If you know someone who should be honoured on the roll, nominations will re-open in August 2005 (more information next newsletter).

President's Report cont.

To move on with more positive news, let me introduce you to our new web-site. For those of you not so familiar with it, please go to www.afmw.org.au and register. You will need a name and password to log-in to the members-only area, where there is capacity for user- and special interests groups to function, for documents to be shared and for those who want to – they can log their CV's and advertise their practise services (or whatever!). Membership forms will be available, and once we have Internet Banking set up, membership fees, dinners etc. will be able to be paid over a secure network. We will also have a bulk e-mail facility, which means we can finally contact the membership by e-mail. This can include the sending of Newsletter and Membership renewals. Please register, up-date your contact details and let us know you are happy to be contacted electronically.

Dr. Deb Colville is our Victorian Web-master, so any documents that people think are of interest to the membership can published on the website by passing onto Deb. We hope to have some of the documents relevant to the current Cervical Screening debate up there soon.

One mooted use for the web-site will be to support members in Sates without a committee. To do this would require some constitutional amendments – these will be circulated in the next newsletter.

Apart from the web-site, most of you could be forgiven for wondering what else AFMW does for you. We hope to rectify that soon have having quarterly reports. AFMW is represented and involved with projects through the Office for the Status of Women's Australian Women's Coalition (Representative Dr. Gabrielle Casper), National Rural Women's Coalition (Representative Dr. Gillian McConnell) and WomenSpeak (Representative Dr. Susie Close), as well as the AMA economics and workforce Committee (Representative Dr. Deb Colville), Federal Government Re-entry Program (Representative Drs. Susie Close and Deb Colville) and the NH&MRC Cervical Screening Project (Representative Dr. Susie Close). If you are interested in becoming a rep. and helping out the current overworked reps, please contact us. We are in danger of burning out those who give so much to the organisation.

The four Office to Women Federal Government Grants (\$50,000 each) have been for a Gender-based Medical Education Project; which we are planning on launching at the next AFMW AGM on August 27th (The "Training for Life" Summary report has been included with your Newsletter); Women Talk Cancer (this is available through the Secretariat – we have 2 copies); "Support for Rural and Remote Female Doctors in Australia" (commencing); and "Achieving Gender and Cultural Competence by Australia's Medical Workforce" (commencing). Again, please contact us if you would like to contribute to or distribute any of these projects – assistance would be very gratefully received.

Dr Desiree Yap

Secretariat

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Secretary: Dr Sarah Garner

Treasurer: Dr Sue Piper

Research: Dr Jan Coles

NCW Rep: Dr Margaret Jenson

Melb Uni Student Reps: Ms Kristen Cornell and
Ms Natalie Marijanovic

Strategic Directions: Dr Lye Pheng Fong

Social Secretaries: Dr Ranjani Ratnam

Newsletter Ed/AMA Rep: Dr Deborah Amott

Training for Life An AFMW/OSW funded project

The AFMW knows the current structure of medical training can be incompatible with the way younger doctors wish to live, work and train. The increased age of medical graduates, length of training programs and likelihood of dual physician marriages is putting an increased strain on an individual's choice of specialty, their requirement for training flexibility and how they must practice on completion of their vocational training. These issues are of particular concern to women because their life course varies considerably for the traditional medical 'male heterosexual Anglo-Celtic.



Every practitioner should be able to pursue their career as they require, without the occurrence of discrimination, financial inequalities, more barriers and less professional recognition. The AFMW have been funded by the Office of the Status of Women to increase the awareness of the medical community about the impact of gender in medical practice. This particular resource aims to inform trainees of their legislative rights in relation to family to help them progress in their medical careers in the way they require.

Contact the AFMW for copies:

www.afmw.org.au

The Victorian Medical Women's Society
invites you to:

Coercion and Resistance: Women Engaging with Medicine

Tuesday 31st May 2005

7:30pm for 8:00pm

Speaker: Jo Wainer

Head: Gender and Medicine Department, Monash University, Melbourne.

Aikenhead Wing

St Vincent's Public Hospital

41 Victoria Pde, Fitzroy (enter from Victoria Parade)

Jo is a sociologist with a long history of involvement with the health professions. She has recently completed a PhD examining the historical basis behind women's initial engagement with, then exclusion from, the healing professions. Jo had great insight into the culture that has developed within western medicine and how women are re-entering it and grappling with it today.

\$15 student members/\$20 full members/student non-members/\$25 non-members

Finger food and drinks provided.

RSVP: 24th May

Please RSVP by the date mentioned to the Secretariat:

Ph: 9419 4644 or

PO Box 202

East Melbourne VIC 8002

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