



AMA

GP Network News

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Pandemic Planning

The Federal Government convened a Pandemic Influenza Primary Care Forum in Melbourne this week. AMA President, Dr Mukesh Haikerwal attended and delivered the opening speech. He commended the Government for its work to date but said more must be done to ensure general practice is involved, prepared and engaged.

Dr Haikerwal said: "The AMA has been calling for more involvement of primary care level health service providers in the development of the Pandemic Plan since the Federal Government released the Australia Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza in October 2003 and formed the National Influenza Pandemic Action Committee (NIPAC)."

Information provision and consultation with general practice must be improved. Dr Haikerwal welcomed the Forum as a positive first step. He said a "communication strategy" is required so that GPs and other primary care staff know what is going on and what plans are being made. The providers of primary care need to be better engaged in developing national, State and local Action Plans.

In addition, Australia needs to establish a good surveillance system at the primary care level. Dr Haikerwal said: "The AMA welcomes the announcement of the extra funding of \$184.8 million for national health emergencies announced on Sunday by the Minister for Health & Ageing – in particular the \$6.5 million that has been allocated to expand the influenza surveillance networks." Expansion of surveillance networks must not be limited to influenza monitoring and needs to recognise the significant role GPs play in the early identification of potential health emergencies. Sentinel systems can play a major role in broader bio-security.

The AMA has submitted a proposal to Government for a comprehensive communication system that provides doctors, hospitals and other health facilities to access information in a timely manner from a single reliable source. The AMA believes this is essential to an effective public health emergency strategy. Such a communication system would also provide the capacity to address localised events and be able to communicate to specific doctors or facilities in a particular area. It would also provide a number of communications methods including at least one real time method. More details of the proposal will be made public in the near future.

The AMA welcomes Government assurances made at the Forum that it is providing funds for the purchase of personal protection equipment sufficient for all General Practitioners. The AMA has raised this issue with the Government ever since the SARs outbreak revealed that Australia had a shortage of these resources. In addition to helping protect frontline health workers this stockpile will ensure general practice does not bear the huge cost that would be associated with obtaining this equipment in the event of a pandemic.

Johnes Disease vaccine

Pfizer Animal Health distributes a vaccine called Gudair which is used in the control of Johnes Disease in sheep. The product contains a mineral oil adjuvant and there is the risk of severe injury should this vaccine be accidentally self-injected. Pfizer have put in place a number of risk mitigation strategies. A component of this strategy is to ensure that GPs have ready access to the necessary information to assist in promptly treating these cases. Pfizer Animal Health, with the assistance of experienced medical practitioners, has developed Guidelines for Medical Practitioners. GPs can access the Guidelines via the Poisons Information Centre, phone number 13 11 26 or directly from Pfizer Animal Health Technical Services on 1800 814 883 which is operated 24 hrs/ 7 days per week. The guidelines will be provided to GPs through either email or fax.

GPNN schedule over Christmas and New Year

This is the last GP Network News for 2005. It will recommence publication on 3 February 2006 unless urgent news necessitates a special edition being issued before that date. Thank you to all our readers for your support during the year. We hope you all have a safe and happy holiday period and wish you all the best for 2006.

AMA is the peak medical organisation in Australia representing 29,000 GPs, specialists and Doctors in Training who "elect" through the payment of annual fees to become a member, reflecting the value and confidence they place on the AMA representing their interests to Government and the wider community. As a member based organisation the AMA's policies and positions are based on consultation with its medical practitioner members and independent from influences associated with Government or other external funding.

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