

The Elms Family Medical Centre

Quarterly Newsletter

Keeping you in touch with developments at our Medical Centre

www.theelms.com.au



Spring 2019

Bacchus Marsh lies within one of the most active growth corridors in Australia, and one of the consequences is that under certain Government classifications we are now officially deemed to be metropolitan. This has a number of significant implications, many of which are not positive. One change is that Medicare pays metropolitan clinics less when bulk-billing patients. Another is that telehealth services are not funded by Medicare when provided by clinics deemed metropolitan. Government grants for advanced emergency training for doctors working at the Bacchus Marsh Hospital are no longer supported. Metropolitan clinics are also discouraged from providing the same level of clinic nursing care through lower available funding for nurses. Some of these changes are already active, with others to come into effect in 2020. Successive Government cuts to health funding in general practice will cost patients more.

Doctor news

Dr Carmen Lei and Dr Rita McMorrow have recently passed the final examinations of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Once they are conferred fellowship of the college, Carmen and Rita will be officially recognised as specialist General Practitioners. This is an immense achievement requiring much diligent studying and multiple rigorous examinations. We congratulate Carmen and Rita on their achievement!

Dr Sue Lee is currently on maternity leave, having given birth to her son (and first child), Sebastian. No doubt baby Sebastian will be keeping mum and dad on their toes!

In the meantime, we are very happy to welcome Dr Haowei Shen as a new member of our GP team. Haowei (pronounced 'How Way') is an advanced GP-registrar who is on a six-month rotation with us. He has previously completed country placements in Loxton and Jamestown in South Australia.

Dietitian news

Maree Chamoun is an Accredited Practising Dietitian and she provides advice about nutrition and healthy eating. She is covering for Marie Huynh (who is on maternity leave) and has a particular interest in weight management, diabetes care, cardiovascular disease and gastrointestinal health. Maree works at The Elms every second Wednesday afternoon, and appointments to see her can be made by calling Nutrition Health and Wellbeing on (03) 9217-6421.

Online booking of appointments

Our online appointment booking system and smart phone applications are proving very popular with patients. It is possible to make appointments without having to ring the clinic and this is especially useful if the need to book an appointment arises outside of normal clinic opening hours. Both standard (15 minute) and long (30 minute) appointments can be booked via the online portal, and appointments can be made up to 2 weeks ahead using this method. Of course, our receptionists can still be contacted if variations are required. The Elms booking app' is available for both Apple and Android smart phones, and is free to download. Information regarding this online service can be found on the clinic website, www.theelms.com.au or by speaking with our reception staff.

Treatment room booking fee and cost of procedures

Elective procedures and minor surgery at The Elms are performed in our nurse-managed treatment room by our doctors. When the treatment room is required, a fee of \$15 applies which is payable at the time of booking the appointment. This fee is not refundable unless the booking is cancelled with sufficient notice. The cost of the procedure is dependent on the nature of the operation, which you should discuss with your doctor before proceeding. For pensioners, most common procedures have a gap fee of \$20. Included in the price is normal post-surgical after-care. Alternatively, patients may choose to be referred to a public hospital or private surgeon for procedures.

Anti-reflux medications being reined in

Evidence has been building for a number of years that the regular use of high dose anti-reflux medications can lead to an increased risk of premature death. This relates specifically to a class of medications called proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), such as Nexium, Somac and Losec. Research has shown that long-term use of these medications is associated with higher rates of heart disease, stomach cancer and kidney failure. Since the 1st of May this year, the PBS no longer subsidises higher doses of these medications, and has placed more restrictions on their use. Patients are encouraged to speak with their doctor about these changes, and to consider using a lower dose, if possible. Many may be surprised to see that a lower dose works as effectively for their symptoms, and for some, may even be able to discontinue them altogether.

Prescription-only vs Over the counter vs PBS subsidisation

It can often be confusing when trying to navigate the different types of medications, their cost and their accessibility. A prescription-only medication means exactly that – only a doctor can enable access to that item. PBS subsidisation is only available by prescription, which means anything that does not need a prescription (over the counter) is paid for in full by the patient. However, there are also some prescription-only medications that are not subsidised by the PBS. These are called private prescriptions. The PBS dictates how much it will subsidise a medication and may sometimes only subsidise it for specific conditions. Thus, a medication may be subsidised for one condition but not another, even if it is the same drug. For example, the anti-viral drug famciclovir is subsidised by the PBS for genital herpes but not oral cold sores, even though it is the same condition affecting a different part of the body. Please discuss with your doctor if you have any concerns about your medications.

Transition to aged care

Something that is often upsetting and avoided by patients and families is the discussion about aged care. Adding to the worry about loss of independence, failing health and being taken away from home are concerns about carer burn out, various forms of elder abuse, and even guilt on the part of the family involved. There is a common perception that moving into aged care is a negative event. However, aged care is only for those who need it. It is not intended for a person who is independent and safe at home with adequate supports.

A person cannot access aged care services without first being assessed to determine their eligibility. This is called an aged care assessment which is usually conducted by a specially trained nurse. This assessment determines the level of services or care that is most appropriate for the person. Having this assessment performed does not mean a person must enter aged care. What it does is to help prepare for the future as the entire process can take many months. We encourage patients and their families to have this important dialogue, as well as speaking with their doctor about the options. Aged care services or assessments are arranged by applying online through www.myagedcare.gov.au or ringing 1800 200 422.

“We are proud to be an Accredited General Practice”

