

# The Elms Family Medical Centre

## Quarterly Newsletter

*Keeping you in touch with developments at our Medical Centre*

[www.theelms.com.au](http://www.theelms.com.au)



### **Summer 2019/2020**

As another year draws to a close, we would like to wish all our patients and their families a safe and happy festive season, and good health throughout the new year. The Elms will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day; however, it will be business as usual otherwise. After-hours service is provided by the Urgent Care department of the Bacchus Marsh Hospital, and emergency attention can also be requested by calling the ambulance service on 000. Patients should make sure that their prescriptions will cover the holiday period. For those with travel plans, a printed medical summary and medication list from your doctor may come in handy. Within Australia, having a My Health Record which contains this information can also be of assistance in case of an emergency or if there is a need to seek medical treatment whilst away.

### **Doctor news**

The Elms has been hosting registrars completing the general practice specialty training program for over two decades. During this period, we have helped over sixty achieve Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. These registrars have been drawn from the rural training stream, allowing them to stay at the practice for at least 12 months and encouraging continuity of patient contact. As of 2020, with Bacchus Marsh being re-zoned as metropolitan by the Federal Department of Health, our registrars will come from the metropolitan training stream. This loss of rural status means that registrars can only stay in the one practice for a maximum of 6 months. Another consequence is that Bacchus Marsh has changed from being a highly sought-after rural training site (due to its proximity to Melbourne) to a less attractive option as we are now amongst the more remote metropolitan locations.

Our current registrars are Dr Carmen Lei, Dr Rita McMorro, Dr Gorgee Dyer, and Dr Hao Wei Shen, with both Carmen and Rita recently completing their Fellowship examinations.

### **Nurse news**

We would like to congratulate nurse Sophie on passing the 15-year mark as a staff member of The Elms. Sophie is our chronic disease management nurse who works mostly behind the scenes helping patients access allied health and mental health services, as well as coordinating the 'Closing The Gap' program for our indigenous patients. She is also a member of our quality improvement committee and has a very important role maintaining our patient care registers. We would like to thank Sophie for being part of our team, and for performing these vital tasks with such enthusiasm and dedication.

### **Physiotherapy services**

'Back In Motion' is a physiotherapy clinic whose main practice is located on the corner of Gisborne Road and Clifton Drive where they have a hydrotherapy pool and gymnasium. Every Wednesday, physiotherapist Mr Shalin Patel also consults at The Elms. He has particular expertise with managing hip and knee pain due to osteoarthritis using a program based on patient education and exercises. Shalin also deals with all manner of sports and occupational injuries, plus post-surgery rehabilitation.

Appointments to see Shalin at either location can be made by calling 03 5367 4130.

## **New billing policy at The Elms due to Government cuts**

Patients may be aware that their Medicare rebate has remained stagnant for many years, meaning that they received less and less to help toward covering medical visits. Our private fee for a 15-minute appointment is currently \$76.00 and the Medicare rebate is \$38.20, meaning patients are out of pocket by \$37.80. When a patient is bulk-billed, the clinic only receives the rebate amount for the visit, meaning the clinic is worse off by \$37.80. As the private fee amount reflects the actual cost of providing the service (which includes paying the doctors, nurses, receptionists, rent, rates, utility bills, medical supplies and equipment, sharps disposal, insurance, etc.), accepting just the rebate amount of \$38.20 through bulk-billing is well short of covering costs.

Hence, from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, patients who do not have a health care card or similar concession will no longer be bulk-billed by their doctor, even if this has been done previously. Also, bulk-billing will no longer be available at all on Saturdays and from 6pm on weekdays. Patients who have a health care card or similar concession and children under 16 years of age will be charged a **discounted** fee at these times, which equates to a \$20 out of pocket cost.

We acknowledge that some patients will be affected by these changes and we agree that more needs to be done by the Government to keep health care accessible and affordable. As a clinic, we have absorbed the rising costs over many years but it is not sustainable when bulk-billing covers only about 50% of the actual cost. The re-zoning of Bacchus Marsh from rural to metropolitan starting in 2020 has triggered this change because we will no longer receive rural support funding.

We encourage patients to voice their concerns with those responsible for the funding of health care services, namely the federal politicians. Patients living in the Ballarat Division (for Bacchus Marsh) should contact Ms Catherine King (phone 03 5338 8123), and those in the Gorton Division (for Melton), should contact Mr Brendan O'Connor (phone 03 8390 6166).

## **Medicare rebates for telehealth no longer available**

Another consequence of the re-zoning of Bacchus Marsh from rural to metropolitan is that Medicare rebates to support telehealth consultations with specialists based in Melbourne are no longer available. The Elms has been conducting telehealth consultations for many years which has helped those with mobility difficulties 'see' their specialist using facilities at our clinic. Patients can still opt to use our clinic for telehealth with their specialist but an out of pocket private fee would apply which is not covered by Medicare.

## **'Tap and Go' now available**

We now have 'tap and go' at reception for easy electronic payments. For patients who have registered their bank account details with Medicare, the rebate from Medicare is deposited directly back into the patient's account almost immediately. With this in mind, we require all accounts to be paid in full on the day of consultation.

## **Summary of changes from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020**

- Children under 16 years and holders of concession cards will continue to be bulk-billed, however:
- From 6pm on weekdays and on Saturdays, patients who have a concession card and children under 16 years of age will be offered a discounted private fee.
- Doctors are unable to offer bulk-billing to patients 16 years or older without a concession card, even if this has been done so previously.
- Full payment is required on the day of consultation, with applicable Medicare rebates transferred automatically back into the patient's bank account.

**"We are proud to be an Accredited General Practice"**

