



VICTORIAN DOCTORS HEALTH PROGRAM

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Chair's Report **The Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Doctors' Health Program** **12th November 2012**

This year has been a very interesting, busy and somewhat stressful year for the VDHP. I would like to thank our excellent professional and administrative staff, under the very able leadership of Dr Kym Jenkins (Medical Director), for the wonderful work they have continued this year. We have been able to see a similar number of new doctors and medical students requiring assistance, as seen in previous years. The mix of students, young doctors, and older doctors, has also remained similar to that for recent years.

I would like to thank the Board of the VDHP, and also our two key stakeholders: AHPRA and the Victorian Branch of the Australian Medical Association. Our stakeholders have been very helpful and supportive during a year of significant uncertainty. The VDHP Board has worked very hard and was sorry to receive the resignation of Prof Napier Thomson due to his new role with the MBA, but thank him with gratitude, for his many years of valuable service to VDHP. We have welcomed Dr Naomi Harris as a new Board member, nominated by the Victorian AMA, earlier in the year.

The main reason for some uncertainty this year has been the consultation process set up by the Medical Board of Australia, to examine the role of external doctors' health programmes, in the overall process of dealing with ill doctors in Australia. The consultation process was started early in the year, and the final outcomes of the consultation are not yet finalised. We understand the significant issues that must be dealt with by the Medical Board of Australia as it considers the various options that are most prudent for regulation, and also for dealing with health matters, in health practitioners suffering illness. That process must necessarily take a significant time, in order that really sound decisions are made, which are likely to influence health practitioner care and regulation for some years to come.

The consultation process has provided a number of unexpected opportunities to further examine our own work, and develop better linkages with other doctors' health advisory services throughout Australia. Early in the year, there was a phase of quite intensive negotiation with other doctors' health advisory services, and in the process a lot of knowledge was obtained about the reasons for different models being used in different places within Australia. Out of those discussions, more information has been learned about the difference between a purely prevention oriented approach, versus a case management approach, as initiated through our own programme. It has also become interesting to see that the doctors in the community, who are actually dealing with sick or substance

dependant doctors and other health professionals, are largely operating on their own in other jurisdictions; whereas, in Victoria, these practitioners have a significant amount of support from the VDHP.

Just in the last week the Medical Board of Australia wrote to us indicating that further funding will be provided to us for another year, from June 30th 2013 to June 30th 2014. The level of funding will be less than the level of funding we have experienced previously. As we have already been considering the possibility that we may not have full funding in the future, this new circumstance provides us with both a challenge, but also an opportunity to look at how we can obtain a more secure funding arrangement, whilst aiming to continue all our current services.

We look forward to a further elucidation of the knowledge developed by the Medical Board of Australia, and how it may further affect the development of our organisation. We are hopeful that we will be able to continue the essential and important functions that we have established already, but it is also a golden opportunity to reconsider a number of the strategies we have embarked on in the past, and see whether there are further initiatives that we could develop, that would further strengthen the service provided to doctors in Victoria.

Dr Bill Pring
VDHP Board Chair