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- Placement guidelines and minimum standards should be developed to ensure the provision of good quality placements. These should include guidelines for supervisors and detail minimum workplace conditions such as workstation, dedicated desktop computer, telephone and induction to the Public Health Unit and Area/Region.
- An induction program should be developed for all new PHOs.
- Time required to carry out the tasks of the PHO representative should be recognised in any placement.
- A mentor system should be introduced into the program.
- The Epidemiology and Health Services Evaluation Branch, in conjunction with Human Resources Branch, should examine options for accreditation of the PHO Training Program.

There was general agreement that the evaluation workshop was valuable and should be conducted on an annual basis.

Susan Furber, Alex Goodwin and Isla Tooth.

HEALTH SERVICES AND THE ELDERLY

Medical and diagnostic services for people aged 65 and over comprise a substantial proportion of all services provided by the Health Insurance Commission under the Medicare Benefits Schedule. To examine the utilisation of these services we examined de-identified data on services used by a cohort of people receiving one or more services in NSW in 1991. The results of these analyses showed that overall, there was not an excessive rate of utilisation among people of this age group. Of more than 7,000 people in this cohort, 39 per cent had between 1 and 10 services during 1991, 66 per cent had between 1 and 20 services and 82 per cent between 1 and 30 services.

Fifty-one per cent had between 1 and 10 doctor's attendances, and 79 per cent had between 1 and 20 attendances. The most frequent attendance to be reimbursed was a standard consultation lasting between 5 and 25 minutes which involved taking a history, examination of the patient and implementing a management plan in relation to one or more problems. Sixty-two per cent of people had a standard attendance at a surgery and 20 per cent had a standard home visit. Forty-four per cent had a initial specialist attendance and 39 per cent had a subsequent specialist attendance.

Differences in diagnostic testing patterns were found between groups of people defined by their age group, geographical area of residence and whether they were referred by a specialist or a general practitioner. We report the results of these analyses and discuss the potential benefits and disadvantages of using claims data to evaluate utilisation of medical and diagnostic services and current clinical practices.

Marion Haas, Louise Rushworth and Marilyn Rob.

NEWS AND COMMENT

FUNDING FOR THERAPEUTIC ASSESSMENT GROUP

The NSW Health Minister, Mr Ron Phillips, has given the NSW Therapeutic Assessment Group (TAG) a commitment for ongoing funding. TAG, which was set up in June 1988 and meets bi-monthly, comprises clinical pharmacologists, directors of pharmacy, key physicians, drug information pharmacists, and representatives from all NSW teaching hospitals and the pharmacology and pharmacy departments of their universities.

The group is chaired by Professor Ric Day and its key activities have included:

- development, in consultation with other expert groups and individuals, of objective guidelines for the appropriate use of specific drugs or drug groups;
- drug utilisation reviews;
- sharing of drug committee policies and decisions of member hospitals;
- dissemination of information as part of its educative and advisory role; and
- research, including a study investigating academic detailing as a strategy to improve the quality of general practitioner prescribing.

For information on TAG contact Roberta Lauchlan on (02) 361 2092.

DENTAL KIT FOR KIDS

The School Dental Clinic at Lismore Base Hospital has used a \$25,500 National Health Promotion Program grant to produce a kit aimed at raising dental health awareness among children at infants and primary school. Hospital Chief Executive Officer Paul Dyer, who launched the kit, said it promoted dental health awareness in an entertaining, informative and educationally sound style. For more information about the kit contact Lismore Base Hospital Senior Dental Therapist Gail Loader on (066) 216235.

NHMRC RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Health and Medical Research Council has recently made recommendations about:

- tetanus prophylaxis for wound management;
- *Haemophilus influenzae* immunisation;
- notifiable diseases - recommended list; and
- *Listeria* infection

and issued the following publication:

- Recommended minimum exclusion periods from school, pre-school and child care centres of infectious diseases cases and contacts.

Details of recommendations and publications can be obtained by contacting Mrs Corinne Hopman on (06) 289 7646.