

TJUKURPA MINYMAKU: WOMEN'S HEALTH

Robyn Pitt

Women's health through the life cycle is a high priority for the Health Council. Women on the lands are the present or future mothers, grandmothers and, in many cases, carers of the frail aged. They are the primary carers of both the previous and next generation.

The aim of the Women's Health program is to:

- Maintain and sustain the highest possible level of clinical care
- To provide the most relevant information, education, support and encouragement to allow women to make positive health and lifestyle choices where able
- To facilitate both of the above in a way that respects both cultural traditions and emerging cultural changes

In an environment where staffing, experience, funding, social direction and health priorities are constantly changing, the program works to achieve its' aims by

- Observing clear guidelines for clinical practice
- Establishing standardised methods of documentation
- Identifying clear program priorities and objectives
- Providing appropriate orientation and support for staff
- Maintaining data base recall and information systems that support core components of the program



Women's Business Manual

In all areas of women's health, staff are guided by protocols that are deemed "best practice" for clients in Central Australia and the Northern Territory. The Manual is currently under review with many Nganampa Health Council staff involved. This is a joint project between Alukura and the Health Council. The next edition of the Manual is due to be published in 2007.

Young and senior girls education

Education providing clear and accurate health and lifestyle information is a key strategy towards achieving better health for women in the longer term. This education begins with school-aged girls. Our ability to offer education in a sustainable fashion is enhanced by the use of the Young Anangu Women's Education Package developed especially for use with girls on the APY Lands. Thanks go to Joane Wilson and Gerry Hannan for their input into the delivery of this package.

Wiltja Residential Health Education Camp

This annual camp took place recently over 3 days in the Adelaide Hills with 29 girls between the ages of 13 and 19 years. It was invaluable to have time in an informal setting with this group of Anangu girls where health education could be delivered through both structured workshops and opportunistic discussion.

The value of this camp was strengthened by the presence of Caroline Dunn, Audrey Brumby, Tjimpuna Dunn and Tjulkiwa Atira – all senior Anangu women.

Thanks go to the staff at Wiltja, Pantjiti Lewis, Rae-Lin Huang, Geraldine Hannan and Elissa Pernu from Women's Council.



Antenatal and Postnatal Care

This area of care has always been a high priority particularly because of the links with early childhood development and growth. The strategies used to sustain a high level of care include:

- The use of a standardised proforma for assessing and monitoring antenatal care
- The development of a database that incorporates all national indices of antenatal care in assessing perinatal outcomes. The statistics collected and the reports generated not only provide a more accurate picture of the health of pregnant women on the APY Lands but also assist in the ongoing review of program directions and priorities
- Access to midwife support and education for women while in Alice Springs awaiting birth
- The aim of employing a midwife at each main clinic.

Links with other Agencies

Developing and maintaining strong links with other health organisations is an important feature of the program. This is achieved through:

- A monthly interagency maternity meeting held at Alice Springs Hospital
- Ongoing liaison with Alukura
- Cooperation in the revision of the Women's Business Manual
- In 2006 Louise Tucker (AHW) visited two Aboriginal health services in Queensland. Both WuChopperin in Cairns and the Townsville Aboriginal Health Service are well known and respected for their Maternal and Child Health programs, and the 'two way' learning was invaluable.

Over the past 18 months the Centre for Remote Health has been overseeing an ultrasound-training project in which a number of our staff participated. Each participant completed a one-week training course to perform dating ultrasounds in their respective communities with a view to seeing if this skill and facility improved antenatal care attendance.

Breast Screening

While the routine two yearly visit by Breast Screen SA was not due this year, ongoing education and attention to self-examination is a major component of the Women's Health Check. While in Alice Springs for other reasons, some women have used the opportunity to attend for a mammogram. A recall system is now almost complete in preparation for the 2007 screen.

In May 2006 Louise Tucker attended a conference on Breast Cancer – "Knowledge to support women in your community". While very informative it was clear that the situation in remote central Australia is very different to that on the east coast. It did, never the less, give us a good insight into the problems encountered by Aboriginal women with breast cancer.

Cervical Screening

This important area of women's health continues to be given a high priority within the program. As in the previous year our screening rate is around 60% of permanent residents due or overdue for screening. Screening rates are higher in the younger age groups but fall in the over 35 year age groups, reflecting the national screening experience. Our objective in the next year is to improve the participation rate with a more intensive focus on strategies such as ongoing reminder letters, target education weeks in particular clinics, and a Women's health workshop. The new NHMRC management guidelines came into effect in July 2006 and these have been incorporated into our database recall lists.

Much of the care and education in women's health would be impossible to achieve in any meaningful way without the help and advice of the women themselves. The Aboriginal Health Workers in all clinics provide a wealth of information and support. I wish to thank all of the staff involved in the Women's Health Program for their skilled contributions and expert advice throughout the year.



Janet and Lilly Rose



Louise and Joanne



Louise Tucker and Mayanna Liddy