

Media release

22 January 2010

HEALTH RECORDS SECURITY TOP PRIORITY

A general practice at the heart of the Black Saturday bushfires, awarded the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) 2009 Victoria General Practice of the Year Award, has worked tirelessly to get the practice back on its feet a year on from the fires.

One of the painfully slow after-effects of the Black Saturday bushfires has been to rebuild all of the vital community information that was lost, including the medical records of all the patients at the Marysville Medical Clinic, now located in Buxton.

When the Marysville Clinic burnt to the ground that day, along with it went all the files, paper records and patient history of many families and individuals living in the area.

Dr Lachlan Fraser, the solo rural GP in Marysville, had back-ups of the data, but the copies saved off-site were burned when his secretary lost her home and nearly her life in the township.

Thankfully they also had an old back up version that was kept in, Alexandra, half an hour north, an area that was also threatened with fire. But the clinic had still lost the past year and half of data, so along with the task of setting up and working from a temporary building, they has also had to re-establish vital medical data for patients.

"We perhaps had half of the information we would have liked and in particular it meant that we lost our recent records that involved patient pathology results or x-rays that we needed to follow up. It has meant that we needed to reconstruct patient histories which is a huge process and extra work during this difficult time for everyone," said Dr Fraser.

Peter Fleming, CEO of the National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) said that in the future, the difficult situation of starting to

build patient files again will be one less thing that GPs have to worry about following a bushfire or natural disaster.

NEHTA is the lead organisation supporting the national vision for e-health in Australia.

"E-health is the electronic collection, management, use, storage and sharing of healthcare information instead of using paper records. A national e-health system will ensure that health information is safely and securely stored at all times.

"This means that the medical treatment for any person affected by a tragedy such as Black Saturday will never again have to be delayed while waiting for all information to be updated or assessed," he said.

For this reason, the RACGP, which is the largest representative body for Australia's urban and rural general practitioners, is determined that GPs such as Dr Lachlan Fraser be a leader in the adoption of e-health in Australia.

"We are currently developing the next edition of the RACGP *Standards for General Practices* (4th edition) and are working with NEHTA to make sure that the Standards are now fully integrated with e-health so that our RACGP members can deliver the highest standard of care to their patients," said Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President and GP in northern New South Wales.

"The new RACGP *Standards for General Practices* will ensure that what the Marysville Medical Clinic and also GPs in flood affected areas of Australia have gone through will never have to be repeated.

"Trauma and grief counselling are high on the list of immediate services provided in these circumstances. However, maintaining high quality health services such as diabetes management and access to pathology results is very important, particularly for our patients with chronic diseases. The quick re-establishment of high quality general practice services can help high risk patients who lost everything back to health," he said.

Dr Fraser agreed and added that electronic records would be a far better way to safeguard patient records which could then be accessed by healthcare providers anywhere in Australia and so helpful for those who did not re-settle in the same location.

For further information and media interviews please contact:
Donna Le Page on 0412 797 937

NEHTA

The National E-Health Transition Authority Limited was established by the Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on July 5th, 2005 to develop better ways of electronically collecting and securely exchanging health information.

NEHTA is the lead organisation supporting the national vision for e-health in Australia; working openly, constructively and collaboratively with consumers, providers, funders, policy makers and the broader healthcare industry; to enable safer, higher quality, accessible, equitable, efficient and sustainable healthcare.

RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is the professional organisation that sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education, training and research in Australian general practice and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners.

-

IMPORTANT: This e-mail and any attachments are confidential and may be

privileged in which case neither is intended to be waived. If you have received this message in error, please notify us and remove it from your system. It is your responsibility to check any attachments for viruses and defects before opening or sending them on. Enquiries regarding e-mail delivery, including any request to unsubscribe or to be removed from an RACGP electronic mailing list, should be directed to itsupport@racgp.org.au

—