



## Managing Outpatient Substance Withdrawal Program – A partnership between General Practitioners and a Drug Health Service Building Partnerships

### Introduction

Enhanced patient care is facilitated through a collaborative partnership between General Practitioners (GPs) and Drug Health Services resulting in more effective management of drug and alcohol withdrawal, treatment associated with medical conditions, the provision of counselling and support for patients and their families in the community.

### Aim

To improve the health and wellbeing of patients with drug and alcohol related problems through an integrated partnership between the patient, GPs and other agencies to address health needs.

### Method

The Drug Health service, in consultation with Drug Health patients, identified partnerships with GPs as an opportunity to provide medical support and better manage substance withdrawal.

The team approached 74 GPs in the Wingecarribee local government area over a 12 month period to promote a partnership model that provided expertise in drug health, counselling and general medicine.



Receiving Award from Amanda Larkin, CEO of SWSLHD for Improving Primary Health Care in the Community, 29 August 2013

L-R: Amanda Larkin, Joanne Garlick, Brett Ross and Greg Frost

### Results

This partnership has improved efficiency and productivity within existing resources and all 74 GPs are now engaged in the partnership. GP referral or recommendation to contact Drug Health has increased access to services and improved and decreased the lead time to initial assessment (Table 2).

**Table 2: Source of Referrals to Bowral Drug Health Service: a comparison between December 2010 and April 2013.**

Referral Source	Dec-10	Apr-13
Family and child protection service		1
Family member/friend		3
General practitioner	3	8
Non-residential alcohol and other drug treatment agency		6
Non-residential community or mental health centre		3
Other criminal justice setting	2	4
Other hospital		6
Self	15	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: Bowral Drug Health Services South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) 2013

Appointment activity and attendance has increased, ultimately increasing the number of patients who complete withdrawal management (Table 3).

**Table 3: Comparison of service provision from Bowral Drug Health Service between October 2010 and April 2013.**

Unit of Measure	October 2010	April 2013
% of General Practitioners involved in shared care for withdrawal management	3%	100%
Lead time between referral and assessment (working days)	10	2
% of direct referrals to Bowral Drug Health linked to a General Practitioner	3%	45%
Number of Face to Face sessions with patients	39	111
% of no shows to appointments (excluding rescheduled appointments)	25%	3%
Completed episodes of treatment per month	7	11
Number of hospital occasions of service per month	87	123

Source: Bowral Drug Health Services South Western Sydney Local Health District 2013

Annual efficiency savings of \$320,000 have been estimated through decreased admissions to Emergency Department (ED), decreased inpatient length of stay, treatment expenses and realignment of medical services within Drug Health

### Conclusion

The partnership improves GP access, offers early intervention at point of contact, and improves coordination of care and follow-up.

The outcomes have resulted in an improvement in patients' health and wellbeing, a reduction in hospital admissions and emergency presentations as well as an increase in the number of patients receiving treatment within existing resources.

The partnership focuses on self management and efficacy, early diagnosis and intervention in withdrawal management.

### Acknowledgements

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Bowral District Hospital Executive

Joanne Garlick Operational Nurse Manager Drug Health Services SWSLHD

Ahmed Jamal Quality Manager Clinical Governance Unit SWSLHD District Office

We acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay our respects to elders, past and present.



L-R: Dr Vincent Roache, David Ryan, Greg Frost, Brett Ross, Terry Flynn, Jane Hutton-Potts, Alison Derrett and Dr Clive Cawthorne