

COVID-19 Primary Care Update No. 24

General Practice Liaison Network, Healthcare Improvement Unit

Monday 30 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Epidemiology

- On 30 March 2020 at 06:00 there were 656 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Queensland and 4093 in Australia;
- >210 000 tests have been conducted so far in Australia
- Queensland Health remains in a Tier 1 response phase. The different Tiers were previously described; there are three tiers corresponding to mild (tier 1), moderate (tier 2) and severe (tier 3) disruption of health care services.
- In a Tier 1 response, the main implications for general practice are: new referrals with a clinical urgency of category 3 are not processed; appointments are not offered for patients on wait lists with category 3 clinical urgency issues; and non-urgent elective surgical procedures are not performed.

MBS Update

- New telehealth MBS items and descriptions are available from 30 March 2020: <http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/news-2020-03-29-latest-news-March> and <http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Factsheet-TempBB>. The attached factsheet was downloaded from the webpage and summarises the main changes. The new MBS items are temporary and will be reviewed before 30 September 2020.
- The bulk billing incentive for GPs to treat patients by telehealth will be doubled; usual business practices can be followed for non-concessional patients; and there will be an enhanced Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) for practices (AMA Media Release – attached).

SHECC Summary, 30 March 2020 at 13:00 – Specific issues relating to primary care that are being considered:

- The issue of breast screening was raised again during the SHECC meeting. A decision whether or not to suspend breast screening of asymptomatic patients will be made before the end of this week. The online appointment system will then be shut off.
- Many hospitals are setting up virtual wards that are successfully managing patients at home as part of the COVID-19 response. We have escalated the issue that patients who are admitted to these wards cannot receive MBS items-of-service from GPs. All stakeholders understand we urgently need a solution.

QH COVID-19 governance structures and meetings with Primary Care

- The State Health Emergency Co-ordination Centre (SHECC) has responsibility for all public health related aspects of managing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Last week our DG, Dr John Wakefield, established the Pandemic Health Response Implementation Advisory Group (PHRIAG). The focus of the PHRIAG is supporting hospitals and ensuring hospital preparedness in dealing with COVID-19. In practical terms, both SHECC and PHRIAG have key roles in managing COVID-19 in Queensland.

- A wide range of Primary Care stakeholders already meet twice a week with a SHECC representative to raise issues and exchange information. DDG Nick Steele today convened a new weekly meeting with key stakeholders from Primary Care so that issues can also be raised, shared and escalated to the PHRIAG as required. During the inaugural meeting today, the issues of PPE shortages in primary care and the need for clinical advice and support were raised

Resources

- The Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network published a number of useful resources on 30 March 2020, including an 'infectious diseases position statement on respiratory virus transmission' and 'putting risk of COVID-19 and transmission by children in context' (both attached)
- The University of Oxford (prof Trisha Greenhalgh) and the NHS published a Video consultation information for GPs guide (attached)

Qld Clinical Senate and Networks

- Update published 30 March 2020 – most of the information was previously disseminated, but it is worth noting that a whole-of-state medications dashboard is being developed

Practical advice

- In a previous Update we included guidance about COVID and COVID-related death certification. The Australian Bureau of Statistics since published a more detailed and practical 'Guidance for certifying Deaths due to COVID-19': <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1205.0.55.001>
- Increasing numbers of Australians who are returning from international travels are being quarantined in local hotels. Many of them require general practice and primary care services as well as prescriptions and medication. We are continuing to work with key stakeholders to ensure everyone receive the care they need. Current arrangements in relation to medication are attached – please spread with all of your relevant contacts (thanks James)

Image of the day

I am unsure if this is inspirational or not, but this image made me smile and seemed worth more than a thousand words

About this Document:

- This document was an e-mail sent to a wide range of primary care staff and clinicians. The content is related to COVID-19 and the Queensland response and is intended for the free use and wide dissemination by the recipients or anyone else who access this webpage
- Every effort has been made to ensure the information is accurate and up-to-date. If you become aware of any issues, please notify us so we can amend our documents
- Please provide any feedback or contact us using our e-mail COVID19-PC@health.qld.gov.au. Please note that the inbox is not continuously monitored, and we may not be able to respond to every message.



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