

Message from the Medical Superintendent

Specialist services on Norfolk and the mainland:

As the Queen once famously said this year is an “annus horribilis” for NIHRACS and our patients. As we enter the second half of 2020, we do in fact see that this pandemic is proving (as we suspected it might) to be a marathon and not a sprint to the finish line. We are in this situation for the long haul and our main concern at NIHRACS is to keep the community safe from COVID as well as still providing quality health care on the island. There are still occasions when we will need to send you to a mainland service, but when doing that we will also take into account the need for crossing borders and being quarantined as well as the risk of a patient being in an area where community transmission of COVID is occurring. In the past week we have had to postpone specialist visits from endocrinology, respiratory, cardiology and ophthalmology for the next few months.

With ever changing opening and closing of borders we have had to seek out different channels for mainland medical care for many of you. Outpatient clinics and elective surgery has been postponed in many mainland areas and as many of you have experienced, we have had to change the care you were due to receive from NSW to Queensland. In 2019 we had a range of specialists visiting Norfolk: geriatrics, neurology, cardiology, respiratory, psychiatry, orthopaedics, nephrology, endocrinology, to mention a few. We had this year planned for the same specialities to visit again as well as some new ones like ophthalmology. This, however, has proved to be impossible in many cases. The positive of this situation, is that we have built up many Telehealth providers and have found that during this pandemic that we are able to provide good care with guidance from specialists on the mainland via Telehealth services. Over the next 6 months we will be building on that system until we can provide usual mainland specialist visits again.

As we postpone or cancel specialist visits we need to look at each referral and judge whether the patient will need to be sent to the mainland, whether we can arrange a Telehealth specialist appointment or whether it is a problem we can deal with on island. It is a huge task for the doctors to check each referral when a visiting specialty is cancelled and may take some time before we contact you. If you know that you are due for a particular specialist visit this year please contact NIHRACS and arrange a consultation (telephone or face-to-face to discuss your own personal needs) This will enable us to assess your personal situation and arrange an alternative for you. Please be patient if you cannot get an immediate appointment with us.

Winter respiratory illnesses and testing:

We are also currently dealing with an increased number of respiratory viral infections on the island. This is usual in winter and as we had very few people travelling to Norfolk, were protected for a while from these. We have not, however, seen any influenza this season which is encouraging. This is due to the high rate of immunisation on island as well as physical distancing that is being applied for safety from COVID. The importance of not hugging, kissing, shaking hands, standing too close to others, coughing or sneezing carelessly remains the best way to reduce any viral infection. This should become a way of life for the foreseeable future. I will take this opportunity to appeal to you all to isolate yourself from others if you are ill even if you believe that you have a simple cold. Stay home immediately and do not go to work,

however necessary you are in your job. Our criteria for COVID testing include fever or the mildest of respiratory symptoms. If we can limit the number of other respiratory viral infections in the community, we will reduce the number of swab tests we are needing to do. We have limited tests available on island and still need to send tests away to Brisbane or Sydney on the first available flight. We will place you in medical quarantine during this time even if we think the likelihood of COVID is low. We believe that if a test was done, a person cannot be released from that quarantine at least until the COVID test is negative. This is a safety measure as I am sure you can appreciate. The Ruby Princess debacle may come to mind. Please be mindful of how important this isolation is to the health of others and be compliant with that request. Most people in this community understand the limited staff, swabs and facility we have, and that all of these rules are designed to assist with keeping us all safe.

Food safety during COVID

Certain practices of food serving and handling are to be avoided during COVID. As many have heard, patrons with COVID spending time in busy restaurants have been the source of several COVID clusters in NSW recently. Buffets and self-service are vulnerable areas as many persons touch the same utensils. Most businesses on Norfolk know these requirements but I urge you to check the NSW Government Food Authority website for guidelines on how to avoid contamination by the virus. <https://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/help/covid-19-advice>

Medications and supplements:

With respiratory illnesses increased some people are seeking self- treatment with over-the-counter cold and flu preparations or inhalers. I would suggest that it is safer to call the GP clinic for a telephone consult and to decide whether or not you require testing at this time. This is the “new world” with COVID and we cannot follow our old systems. Studies in the past have found that Vitamin D, Vitamin C, Zinc and Echinacea play a role in improving the immune system during viral infections and can reduce the severity of an illness. (*Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.2018 Apr 29;2018:5813095*)

There is also some evidence emerging that having low Vitamin D levels increases the likelihood of complications from COVID. Being out in direct sunshine for 10 minutes 3 times per week helps to increase Vitamin D levels. If you are an indoors person and cannot do this ask your GP or pharmacist about supplements. (*Low Vitamin D Linked to Increased COVID-19 Risk - Medscape - Jul 29, 2020*)

NIHRACS Entrance Screening:

At this time we are still screening all staff, patients and visitors to NIHRACS. We have the most vulnerable people on island in our facility and are trying our best to prevent inadvertent entry of COVID. Please be patient with this system. Staff who have other jobs to do are also assigned to “door duty” and we are very grateful to them for doing this. Please do not be offended when a staff member at the entrance to NIHRACS asks you questions and takes your temperature. I know you will understand how important that is. If the virus enters accidentally, we cannot reverse that and I am sure that no-one would want to be that person who introduces COVID to our loved ones in the hospital or aged care.

Positive and negative effects of the pandemic:

We understand the stresses that uncertainty and changing situations have on people. It is very difficult for most people to be away from loved ones, not have access to certain things that they usually do and to have everything in limbo with no apparent end in sight. However,

lockdowns and challenges do have some positive results. Matthew Lieberman, a neuroscientist in the USA has looked at the way we are wired to explain our powerful need for social connection. In his 2013 book “Social: Why Our Brains are Wired to Connect” he observes the instinct people have to connect with others especially in adverse situations. As humans over the centuries, we have overcome challenges in the world around us like natural disasters, wars and pandemics, and in doing so altruism, cohesion and cooperation have, as a species, become ingrained in our neural pathways.

On the downside, with our neural pathways wired to be sociable, the lack of social interaction and loneliness can cause us emotional pain akin to a physical pain. We all understand the concept of emotional pain leading to increased smoking, drinking, eating or just a lack of self-care.

In a time of crisis people are wired to reach out to one another for support. A shared experience of difficulty can help others endure situations more easily. Over the last 50 years we have moved into a world where all human activity has been assigned an economic value. During the pandemic, we have been forced to give up some things we valued: foods, products, travel and entertainment. Many have discovered that the simple things like family and close friends are more important. A pandemic is especially cruel in that the exact thing we crave, social contact, is what we should avoid. Be aware of the suffering and loneliness of others and touch base with them. A phone call, text, Skype chat from a distance, a caring word can make a huge difference to someone’s day. The giving to others can give humans as positive a feeling as receiving.

A sense of “belonging” in a community is as important to our wellbeing as having social contact. A togetherness in adverse conditions gives us a collective resilience to overcome. If you or someone you know is suffering during this situation, please ask for help. We have many different health professionals in NIHRACS and other on-island agencies who can help.

Whether we can return to “normal” or whether we need to find a “new normal” remains to be seen. Many will long for the old and live in the past of what was. But this gives us the opportunity to see that the old ways may have not been sustainable and that we should perhaps get rid of some material shackles and again find the important things in life – family, community, nature and simple wellbeing.

Thank you for your assistance in helping to keep the community safe

Dr Michelle Bonnici

7 August 2020

Flu Vaccines - Get in quick, stocks are limited!

In light of the current health climate, NIHRACS encourages all community members to obtain a flu vaccination. Influenza is a serious illness and can be fatal. Protection against influenza is highest in the first three to four months after vaccination. Getting vaccinated in April or May allows protection during the peak influenza transmission period, which runs from around June to September in most parts of Australia.

It is never too late to vaccinate since influenza can circulate in the community all year round.

There are currently no vaccines that protect against COVID 19.

Whilst influenza vaccine will not prevent coronavirus infection it can reduce the severity and spread of influenza, which may make a person more susceptible to other respiratory illnesses like coronavirus.

Cost of the Flu vaccination is \$20 each.

We are conducting these via appointments only please phone the GP Clinic on 22091 to book your appointment.



Health and Wellbeing Weekly Update

A reminder of the key COVID-19 prevention messages:

- Physical distancing
- Stop any Spread – hygiene
- Look after yourself and others
- Know the symptoms

Successful Healthy Cooking Demo with a side of *Salsa*

Last Saturday we had our eighth healthy cooking demonstration with chef James Garden but this time we had an extra bonus of a Cuban salsa dance demonstration led by Dani. Over 40 people enjoyed the event and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. James showed us how to use Kingfish to make a quick, healthy and delicious dish called Pescado Estofado. If you are interested in the recipe, have a look at the News section on the NIHRACS website (www.norfolkislandhealth.gov.nf). If you are interested in joining the Cuban salsa dance program, come along to the SDA Hall every Monday afternoon at 5.30pm. Thanks to everyone who came along and special thanks to James and Dani. Look out for details of the next healthy cooking demonstration, hopefully we will be able to continue these at least every second month.



Sleep Awareness Week

This week is Sleep Awareness Week and is promoted by the Sleep Health Foundation – they are promoting the critical role that sleep plays in health and wellbeing. For more information check out <https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/key-events/about-sleep-awareness-week.html>

Celebrate You – from the Alcohol and Other Drug Foundation

This campaign acknowledges that Australians are trying hard to make it through part, or all, of the COVID-19 lockdown and encourages people to reduce their drink count and realise a host of achievable benefits that come from a few less drinks. These benefits include weight loss, better sleep, more money in your pocket, a healthier immune system and a reduced risk of breast cancer. For more information go to <https://adf.org.au/celebrateyou/>

August is Tradies National Health Month (from Lucy Stewart, Physiotherapist)

NIHRACS is encouraging all Tradies to stop and have a think about your health, at work, this month.

If you are a Tradie then you rely on your body for work. Your body is often your primary tool and if your body breaks down through injury or chronic illness you can't work to the best of your ability. The average time off work due to a serious workplace injury is 5-6 weeks which people often cannot afford. Statistics show that 3 in 5 serious workplace injuries involve a Tradie, despite Tradies only making up 35% of the workforce.

Here are some tips on what you can do to better look after your health:

- Warm up each morning before you start work with some targeted stretches, such as quadricep stretches (front of the thigh) if your work involves lots of squatting
- Pace your workload and rate throughout the day to avoid issues related to overuse and fatigue
- Communicate well with your workmates to ensure you are working in the most efficient and safe manner
- Be willing to speak up if you feel uneasy about the level of risk you are exposed to at work
- Don't put yourself at risk of injury by rushing
- Be willing to say 'no' when required to ensure both your own safety and that of others, even if it might make you unpopular at that moment. Worksite supervisors and employers are legally responsible for safe worksites and conditions and will be held accountable if there are breaches of work site regulations
- Seek advice from your Physiotherapist if you experience any aches or pains that are persistent, rather than waiting till it's bad enough to stop you from continuing work
- Manage injuries immediately with the RICE method (rest, ice, compression, and elevation).
- Check out the videos on some pre-work warm up ideas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S24IVUN8WAw>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YbzW8_wriY

Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) starting 18 August

NIHRACS and Ken and Julie Weslake from the SDA Church are working together to deliver CHIP on Norfolk, starting Tuesday 18 August. CHIP is an evidence based lifestyle group education program focussing on "whole-person" health. It will run over 12 weeks, with 18 sessions incorporating information on nutrition, exercise, behaviours and will provide many useful tools to assist people in making changes. Each session will include a healthy food tasting. Participants will also receive a great kit of resources. The cost to participate in the whole program is \$99. For more information please contact Karen Innes-Walker, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator email: karen.walker@hospital.gov.nf; phone: 22687 or Ken or Julie Weslake, SDA Church on 22201 or nufkason@gmail.com.