

MEMBERS' UPDATE

SPRING 2023

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Spring is almost upon us as the days are starting to get longer and we're seeing more frequent bursts of sunshine!

On August 7th, the Board facilitated an Information Forum for Members at Newport Community Hub. Times are very challenging in General Practice and the Board wanted to update Members as to the financial position that we find ourselves in and how we are responding. To see an overview of the information provided [please click here.](#)

Our grateful thanks to Lisa (CEO) and 'the Team' as they continue to demonstrate their ability to pivot and respond to the everchanging challenges in this 'healthcare space.'

If you are in the position where you'd like to 'give back' to the Co-op and contribute your professional skills to the Board, in particular, marketing and legal expertise, that would be highly valued. Or, if you feel able to assist the Board with written communication expertise, we would welcome you reaching out to us at info@westgatehealth.coop

Thank you to you, our members who have continued to journey with us through these challenging times – your patience, support, and trust continues to be greatly appreciated!

Jenny Morris
Chair on behalf of the Board

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Since commencing at Westgate Health Co Op in late January 2023, it has been a busy first half of the year, with the implementation of new medical software which has been rolled out at both clinics. This has enabled us to improve access for our patients and the wider community, including 'real time' online appointments enabling patients to make appointments at a time that suits them. The software has also enabled our clinical staff to run in depth reports to identify risk factors, inviting patients to participate in preventive health activities for better patient outcomes.

In mid-June we welcomed back dentist, Dr Jo-Anne Cherry, who will be working Mondays. She has a wealth of experience with children and will be participating in the Government Dental Scheme which will enable eligible patients up to \$1,052 in dental benefits over two years for children aged 0–17 years in families that are eligible for Family Tax Benefit A.

As you read this, we will have just completed the process for accreditation in line with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners 5th Ed Standards. This recognises our commitment to providing high quality, safe and effective care to our patients and the wider community. As a part of this process, 200 patients surveys were completed and evaluated. The feedback was very positive, whilst also identifying where we can make improvements.

In response to feedback, we now allocate appointments each day to enable sick paediatric patients to be seen in a timely manner.

We welcome the news of the Commonwealth Government Bulk Billing Incentive program for pensioners and concession cardholders to be introduced November 1st and will keep you informed as we implement this initiative.

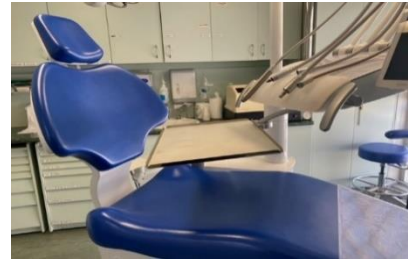
Thank you to our members for your continuing support.

Lisa De Petro
CEO

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Reminder to our members that your annual 2024 membership is due for renewal. You can access this through our online portal or by contacting our friendly reception team at either Newport or South Kingsville clinics.

DENTAL UPDATE



Dr Jo-Anne Cherry, Dentist

Jo-Anne has been in practice for over 35 years and has an interest in:

- Endodontics
- Infection control
- Preventative dentistry

**We have a new
dental chair!**

Jo-Anne also specialises in Paediatric dental care. If you are eligible for the Child Dental Benefit Scheme, these funds can be utilised.

Jo-Anne will be available on Mondays at our South Kingsville clinic, please contact our friendly reception team to make an appointment on (03) 9391-6777.

WELCOME BACK from leave:

Dr Michael Willis returns to South Kingsville on Wednesday 23rd August 2023

Dr Dervila Holmes returns to Newport on Wednesday 06th September 2023.

Dr Kay Whitfield returns to South Kingsville on Monday 11th September 2023.

Appointments with them are now available.

COMMENCING LEAVE:

Dr Stephen O'Shea will be on leave from 22nd August 2023 – returning on 9th October 2023

Dr Simone Stanton will be on leave from 14th September - returning on 16th October 2023.

Please find an overview of the information presented at the Information Forum held on August 7th 2023.

Background: presented by Jenny Morris, Board Chair

- All GP / medical practices are facing challenges with a number ceasing to exist.
- The Annual General Meetings and Annual Reports of 2021 and 2022 have reflected these challenges.
- Unfortunately, with our best efforts we still find ourselves in a precarious situation.
- The board has been lobbying state and federal local members.
- We introduced mixed billing in October 2022 : raise revenue for doctors and the cooperative and to enable us to recruit doctors which we have achieved; however we still need more doctors.
- We've not been allocated a registrar (doctor undertaking specialist general practice training) for the 2nd half of 2023as there weren't enough registrars to go around.

Financials: presented by Simon Oldham, Board Treasurer

- We have had an accounting loss of approximately \$350k each year for the past couple of years, which has equated to \$600k dollars in cash
- Of which \$400k is a reduction in the cash at bank over the last 12 months
- Currently we are losing about \$20,000 to \$30,000 a month
- Revenue has gone down because:
 - 30% of members haven't renewed their membership in the past 3 years
 - The demographic of our patient mix is heavily reliant on bulk billing which at 30% of ~\$39 simply does not cover the overhead costs (that is the indirect costs) of running the centre
 - We don't have enough full fee-paying patients.
 - The introduction of mixed billing has not seen the increase in revenue that we anticipated with bulk billing of standard consultations still at a percentage higher than we had planned for; in the last 4 months we are at 60-70% of all consultations being bulk billed. The introduction of mixed billing has also had an impact on the number of members.
 - Members are used to and want to be bulk billed, and doctors want to 'be kind' and often bulk bill however this is not sustainable.
- Increasing costs
 - The Co-op has seen rising costs in overheads for things that we have no discretion on for example, utilities, insurances, Workcover. Some in the order of 35-40% for things that we have no discretion over.
 - We have seen software to manage our member database rise 25%. We needed to upgrade IT systems which has not been cheap.
- **What have we looked at doing to address the serious situation we find ourselves in?**
 - We need more volume of patients / appointments, so:
 - We engaged recruiters to look for more doctors
 - There has campaigns to recruit doctors
 - Directors have approached doctors to join the practice
 - We have deferred capital works spend.
 - We invested in the clinic with upgrades to dental, systems and process.
 - Consolidation - We looked at consolidation into Newport, we looked at consolidation into South Kingsville
- **BUT:**
 - Newport has insufficient rooms and there is a fixed lease for the next 18 months and the saving in overhead costs would be offset by the other revenue losses eg external rents (chemist etc.)
- We continue to consider:
 - Reducing costs
 - Look for more appointments for patients
 - Revised Membership fee structure
 - Consultation fees
- Our predecessors on the board had a 'rainy day fund'; we are using that now to continue to operate, but we are whittling that down.
- Under company law, as a board we have responsibilities as directors, essentially we cannot operate if we are insolvent and must take actions to prevent this from happening.
- However, we all feel the responsibilities to the patients /members and to staff.

Moving forward: presented by Jenny Morris.

- Explaining to members the need for them to be mixed billed.
- Ask for their support as we look to move away from bulk billing to mixed billing
- We are working with doctors to give them clearer guidelines as to when to bulk bill.
- We will continue to provide the members with updates.
- **As a Board we remain committed to there being a Westgate Health Co-op going forward but we all need to work together and we need your help.**

Question time

Below are some of the questions and the responses.

Question - Are there ways to find out why 30% of our members have left

Response - *Members have left for a number of reasons 1) during and post COVID attending a GP with respiratory issues was addressed in Respiratory clinics; 2) inability to secure an appointment in a timely manner. 3) Introduction of mixed billing and cost of living pressures.)*

Question We cannot get into to see a doctor when needed, would be better to just have no membership and have a fee

Response – *A Co-operative structure is a legally incorporated entity designed to serve the interests of its members. Membership fees are currently being reviewed; the timing of this is likely 4Q 2023; any changes are to ensure that membership fees are not a barrier.*

Question How long can WGH sustain a \$30k a month loss for, when will you have to pull the pin, how long have we got

Response - *We cannot sustain losses of that magnitude for 4-5 months. The Board has set a threshold of cash that it is not willing to draw below.*

Question - Nurse/Practitioner model, do we have that? Would we have trouble attracting doctors with this

Response - *Like doctor's nurse practitioners are in high demand and the Medicare rebates offered are substantially lower than those of GP's and for those reasons it is not viable.*

Question - How many full time/part time doctors do we have? Currently we have 5.4 doctors.

Response - *Recently I have been bulk billed with a few items on my list for consultation. Perhaps a much clearer fee set would take the pressure off? We are working with doctors on guidelines when bulk billing is appropriate.*

Question - Would a merger with another clinic be considered

Response - *the Board has done some exploration and there is not a similar service in the area that is patient centric.*

Question - What is the Sth Kingsville building worth? If you went to the government, the with approx. 4million do you think they would match it?

Response - *There are no levels of government that are offering to match what we would bring to the table.*