

## WORKCOVER AUTHORISED MEDICAL PRACTITIONER NETWORK

**T**he Occupational Medicine Branch of the NSW WorkCover Authority ensures the provision of a wide range of occupational medicine services to workers in NSW. This is achieved in conjunction with medical practitioners authorised by WorkCover to conduct certain statutory medical examinations. This network of medical practitioners numbers more than 360 and includes general practitioners and specialists including occupational physicians and academics. WorkCover aims to expand the network so all workers in NSW have ready access to medical advice on occupational health matters. The network has the potential to deliver a wide range of occupational medical services at the local level, and also serves as a model for the development of a national approach to providing effective occupational health services, particularly in rural areas. Workers requiring medical examination under current regulations include those engaged in the asbestos, abrasive blasting, electroplating, lead, spray painting and pest control industries.

### Available WorkCover medical training

Since the introduction of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1983 there has been an upsurge of interest in occupational health in the general community. In turn, medical practitioners have been increasingly approached by employers and employees to provide occupationally related medical services. To support these practitioners a training program has been developed by the Occupational Medicine Branch of WorkCover. This activity was formalised in 1987 with the introduction of an induction seminar for all new WorkCover Authorised Medical Practitioners. The seminar has been repeated twice yearly since then and has been extended from a half-day to a two-day program. Each participant is given a training manual which can be kept for reference. The depth of learning is up to each participant, but literature references are given in the training manual so topics of interest or controversy may be explored further. The occupational physicians of WorkCover are also available for further discussion. A take-home multiple choice examination is also given to reinforce the learning of important concepts. After successful completion of the examination the medical practitioners enter the WorkCover Authorised Medical Practitioner Network where they receive support from WorkCover occupational health physicians. WorkCover aims not only to improve the standard of occupational statutory medical examinations but to encourage medical practitioners to go further and develop their skills in occupational medicine.

### Developments for the control of hazardous substances

The training program had been restricted to some extent by the specific nature of current regulations. However, it is government policy to review and to rationalise regulations. In the area of hazardous substances, this means the replacement of a large number of relatively specific regulations with just one regulation. The proposed Hazardous Substances Regulation has recently received public comment and is expected to be gazetted by mid-1993. This regulation is designed to cover the use and safe handling of a wide range of hazardous chemicals and dusts.

Provision is made in this proposed regulation for the occupational medical examination of workers by WorkCover Authorised Medical Practitioners. In recognition of the fact that these practitioners have received training in the health effects of hazardous substances, the exact form of the medical examination is usually left to the judgment of the practitioner. This approach ensures flexibility in matching the medical examination to the individual worker's needs. It also encourages a rational approach to the investigation of new health hazards due to changes in workplace technology. The Authorised Medical Practitioner is responsible for coordinating occupational health surveillance, performing medical examinations and determining workrelated health effects.

In response to these developments the induction seminar is being developed further to incorporate a general approach to the management of workers exposed to hazardous chemicals and dusts. Sources of information on the extremely wide range of hazardous substances in use will be given. More specifically, the health issues surrounding the use of potential or proven carcinogenic substances in the workplace will be addressed. Other issues to be covered include the risks associated with occupational exposure to synthetic mineral fibres and chemicals affecting reproduction.

The next induction seminar for WorkCover Authorised Medical Practitioners will be held on Thursday, October 29 and Friday, October 30, 1992 in Sydney. For more information contact Kelvin Wooller on (02) 370 5106 or write c/- WorkCover Authority, Locked Bag 10, Clarence Street, Sydney 2000.

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## CONFERENCE REMINDER

The first annual NSW Public Health Network Conference will be held on November 23 and 24 at Westmead Hospital. The main speakers will include Professor Peter Baume, Ms Liz Williams, Dr Lyn Clarke and Professor Phillip Boyce. NSW Health Department Director-General Dr Bernie Amos will open the conference, which aims to present the scientific activities of members of the Public Health Network. Sessions will cover environmental health, infectious disease, chronic disease and injury, health services and economics, and maternal and child health.

Registration fee is \$60 for the two days, or \$30 a day. Registration forms can be obtained by contacting the conference organiser by telephone (02) 391 9218 or facsimile (02) 391 9232.

## CALLING CENTRAL COAST PHU

The facsimile number shown in the May 1992 *Public Health Bulletin* for the Central Coast Public Health Unit was incorrect. The number shown was that of the Central Coast Area Health Service (general number).

**The correct facsimile number for the Central Coast PHU is (043) 20 2822.**