

*Editorial***SPRING TIME DOWN UNDER**

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I write this report on the day we Australians refer to as ‘the day a horse race stops the nation’. It is the 150th year of our most prestigious horse race, the Melbourne Cup which will be run at 3pm today. Australians everywhere will be watching the national broadcast of this monumental event hoping that the horse they have drawn in the local sweepstake will win the day. People lucky enough to be at the cup will be/are dressed in their finery; unfortunately, it is an overcast, cold and rainy day in Melbourne! Oh well, the flowing champagne will limit the effect of the cold and wet I am sure!

I will be watching the race from Canberra, the nation’s capital. Like many Australians I will join colleagues for a luncheon, and together we will show our support by barracking for a horse/s of our choice throughout the television broadcast. It only happens once a year, but I, and my fellow compatriots look forward to that sense of national pride and camaraderie that the cup inspires!

While rain is not the ideal weather condition that race goers wished for today, the unusually high rainfalls experienced across the country in the past few months have resulted in the breaking of the 10 year drought. Storage dams are at last refilling, farmers are rejoicing at expected high yield crops and, as is usual at this time of the year, asthma and hay fever sufferers are having to manage allergy symptoms resulting from high pollen counts. One in every 10 Australians suffers from Asthma. This high prevalence rate impacts on the health care system as resources are diverted to prevention and intervention therapies. Nurses, particularly those who are employed in rural environments, provide the majority of health care support to local populations. Addressing the burden of disease imposed by increasing prevalence of chronic conditions such as Asthma, is the cornerstone of the new health priorities established by the Australian Government (Al-Motlaq, Mills, Birks, & Francis, 2010; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, 2007). Primary care prevention and intervention initiatives are advocated and resourced as Government attempts to enhance the health of the population while reducing health care costs (Al-Motlaq, et al., 2010).

The newly elected Australian Government is investing in the health care system. Funding is being allocated to increase health student’s access to clinical placement and infrastructure grants are currently being provided to enhance clinical practice spaces within academic environments and health care settings (HWA, 2010). Projects that support capacity building of nursing and allied health are prioritised for the first time! The Australian Government has also increased scholarship funding for nurses and midwives to undertake pre-service education specifically targeting students who live in rural environments, specialist post graduate education and are also supporting professional development activities. Many nurses are applying for funding through these scholarship programs to upskill their knowledge and practice to better manage the populations growing chronic disease epidemic. Nurse Practitioners are taking a lead role in managing clients with chronic disease. While these initiatives are welcomed research indicates that retention of nurses and midwives and other health care professions in rural and remote settings is less than optimal adding to a growing disparity in health of these populations compared with metropolitan counterparts (NRHA, 2010). Government has increased training places for all health care professionals however innovative strategies to improve recruitment and retention of nurses, midwives and

other health care providers to rural and remote practice contexts is required if new graduates are to take up these practice opportunities (Francis & Mills, 2010). Monitoring the impact of new initiatives will continue. It is hoped that the lofty goals identified in the raft of recent Government reports will address the health needs of Australians and support programs to promote health professionals uptake of practice in rural and remote contexts will be achieved.

I am off to watch the great race, wish me luck!

References

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