

# REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

National Information Service

February 2000 – January 2001

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<b>List of abbreviations</b>
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AAAGP	Australian Association of Academic General Practitioners
AOD	Activities of Divisions database
DHAC	Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
GP Branch	General Practice Branch
GPEP	General Practice Evaluation Program
GPPAC	General Practice Partnership Advisory Council
MAHS	More Allied Health Services
NHPA	National Health Priority Areas
NIS	National Information Service
OBF	Outcomes-Based Funding
SBOs	State-Based Organisations
SOs	State Office of the Department of Health and Aged Care
PHC RED	Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development
RED	Research, Evaluation and Development
WONCA	World Organisation of Family Doctors

## Role of the National Information Service

The National Information Service (NIS) provides information about Australian general practice research and activities of Divisions of General Practice, by collation of research data and providing a range of support and evaluation resources.

The NIS is funded by the General Practice Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC). It was established in August 1995 to support the activities of the General Practice Evaluation Program (GPEP). This role later expanded to include support activities for Divisions of General Practice for the Divisions Section of DHAC. The NIS has developed the following core functions:

- Information collection and storage  
The NIS has established electronic databases and print-based collections of research, evaluation and development activities funded under the GPEP and Divisions programs.
- Value adding  
The NIS synthesises, distils and critically evaluates the raw information in the databases, as well as engaging with current issues in Australian general practice.
- Dissemination  
This has been a major role of the NIS since 1995, aiming to transit useful and useable knowledge to appropriate target audiences, including policy makers, researchers, academics, Divisions of General Practice, clinicians and other stakeholders. As forms of dissemination must satisfy the requirements of different users, NIS dissemination activities have been diverse. They include organising the annual GPEP research conference in Hobart, producing many written publications, distributing the Suite of NIS Databases on CDrom, and making a wide range of information available through the NIS website.
- Networking  
This is an essential function for a successful information service, to provide up to date and accurate information about researchers and other stakeholders.

The NIS is well placed as a national centre to observe and comment on GPEP and the Divisions program. It provides a single point of access to information about Australian general practice from a wide variety of sources. The NIS combines the skills of two teams. The research and evaluation team has the skills to link research and policy, draw together findings and implications for research programs which are relevant for policy development. The IT

team develops and maintains effective tools for data collection, to develop and maintain databases, the website and support those using our electronic products through the Help Desk.

### **Mission statement**

The mission of the National Information Service is to develop, maintain and promote a national focus for information about initiatives funded through the GP Strategy.

## Current staff members at January 2001

### Director

Professor Louis Pilotto BSc, MBBS (Hons), PhD, FRACGP, FAFPHM

### Manager

Ms Libby Kalucy BSc Hons, MSc, Dip Ed

### Research Unit

Ms Libby Kalucy BSc Hons, MSc, Dip Ed

Dr Jane Raupach MBBS, FRACGP, DipRACOG

Ms Anne Magarey BA Hons

Ms Barbara Beacham B Soc Sci – Human Services

Mr Graham Lyons B Ag Sci

### IT Unit

Mrs Vicki Sellick BA, Grad Dip Info Stud, AALIA

Mr Craig Godden BA

Ms Karen Siegmann (Conference Coordinator) BA, Grad Dip Soc Sci (Policy & Admin)

Mr Ashley Dunn B Bus (Management Information Systems)

### Administration Unit

Ms Fiona Thomas Cert Arts (Int Dec), IIDDA

Ms Natasha Garrett

### Previous staff members

Dr Bronwyn Veale (to June 2000)

Dr Wendy Rogers (to July 2000)

Professor Chris Silagy (to December 2000)

Professor David Weller (to December 2000)

Ms Catherine Hurley (to October 2000)

\* New staff members will be appointed in February 2001

**Photo board**

Louis Pilotto  
Director

Libby Kalucy  
Manager

Jane Raupach  
Senior Research Officer

Anne Magarey  
Research Officer

Barbara Beacham  
Research Officer

Graham Lyons  
Research Assistant

Vicki Sellick  
Info & Website Coordinator

Craig Godden  
Programmer

Karen Siegmann  
Project Officer

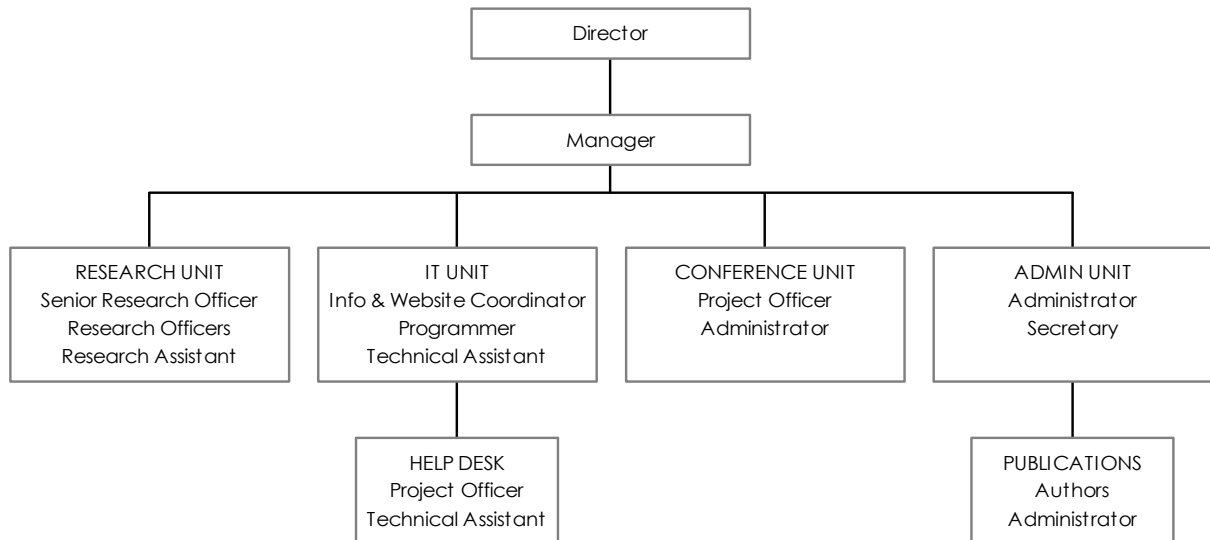
Ashley Dunn  
Technical Assistant

Fiona Thomas  
Administrator

Natasha Garrett  
Secretary

## Organisational chart at January 2001

### National Information Service



## Administration arrangements

The National Information Service is administratively part of Flinders University, Adelaide. All staff of the NIS are employees of the Flinders University, located in the School of Medicine within the Department of General Practice and all financial accounting is provided by FUSA.

The NIS is funded by the Quality Initiatives and Divisions Sections of the General Practice Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care.

The NIS has completed another successful year based in the Department of General Practice at Flinders University, Adelaide. It has been a year marked by internal and external changes, which have provided a challenging environment in which to complete the year's business plan.

2000 saw the introduction of a new Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development (PHC RED) Strategy within the GP Branch of DHAC. This strategy builds on the success of the GPEP, while broadening the focus to acknowledge the need for greater integration between general practice and the wider primary health care system. The General Practice Partnership Advisory Council (GPPAC) has worked on the development of this strategy in consultation with the GP Branch.

Internally, the NIS experienced a number of changes at senior level, with two Co-Directors based interstate or overseas and the third resigning for personal reasons early in the year. Through the efforts of the Acting Manager Dr Wendy Rogers, the Acting Head of Department of General Practice Professor Liz Farmer and the dedication, experience and ability of the whole NIS team, the impact of these changes was minimised, and the NIS was able to meet all its commitments.

The NIS conducted another successful GPEP Conference in Hobart early in May. The experience accumulated from previous conferences was of great benefit to the conference organising team led by Karen Siegmann and Wendy Rogers, in the rush to complete the preparations in a short time period. This conference was the last using the name "GPEP" as this program has now come to an end, with no further research projects to be funded from this source after November 1999. The conference provided an opportunity to reflect on partnerships built up during GPEP, and to look ahead to new research strategies. Once again, the conference provided a successful combination of networking, research presentations, and skill building workshops, with the stimulation of good speakers from Australia and overseas.

The major work undertaken by the NIS this year reflects a period of retrospection on GPEP and the transition to primary health care research. The NIS research team, which included Wendy Rogers, Jane Raupach, Anne Magarey, and Graham Lyons has produced a number of publications, with the publishing assistance of Fiona Thomas, and administrative support of Natasha Garrett. The Research team has:

- summarised a decade of GPEP projects

- conducted an audit of content and methodology of completed projects
- published an anthology of valuable literature reviews from completed projects
- examined the extent of involvement in GPEP research of consumers and non-clinicians
- explored the contested issues of definition of general practice and primary health care
- examined how to strengthen research in primary health care, so that it is more relevant to policy and practice.

The IT team was particularly busy in 2000. The Outcomes-Based Funding (OBF) template continued to be modified to meet user requirements, including the introduction of functionality for planning for More Allied Health Services (MAHS) funding in late 2000. The IT team efforts culminated in the release of the Suite of NIS Databases in August in time for the National Divisions Forum. From the CDrom distributed freely by the NIS, users were able to access four databases, including for the first time the strategic and business plans of 100 Divisions of General Practice for the year 1999–2000. The NIS programmer Craig Godden developed strategies to facilitate basic and advanced searches of these databases. Vicki Sellick supervised the cataloguing of information in the plans and other databases using NIS controlled keywords. The Help Desk staff Karen Siegmann and Ashley Dunn supported Divisions staff in using these NIS electronic products. Barbara Beacham conducted an evaluation of the Help Desk in October 2000.

The NIS website continues to be re-designed and updated, with constant checking of links to other sites. Dissemination of information via the NIS website has become more feasible as technology develops.

I am writing this report as the new NIS Director, having commenced as Head of Department of General Practice at Flinders University in September 2000. I am aware that the NIS owes its continued success to the strong foundation built up by successive staff members since 1995.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge and thank Professor Chris Silagy for his initial inspiration and vision, and Professor David Weller for his ongoing sustained support. Both have continued as Co-Directors after leaving Flinders University, providing the NIS team with continuity and the benefit of their skills and expertise. Chris continued his role as Professor and Director of the Monash Institute of Public Health and Health Services Research. David continued his role as NIS Co-Director from his new position as Professor of General Practice at Edinburgh University, Scotland.

Dr Bronwyn Veale has made a significant and enduring contribution to the NIS first as NIS Manager in 1997, then more recently as Co-Director since 1999. During this period her vision

and commitment provided a substantial foundation for NIS activities. Bronwyn resigned from this position in 2000 but thankfully intends to continue her involvement in the NIS in the future.

Dr Wendy Rogers was the NIS Acting Manager in the first half of 2000, providing essential leadership and continuity as well as making an outstanding intellectual contribution to NIS publications. She has continued to provide valuable input to the NIS from her position in Edinburgh as a Sidney Sax post-doctoral fellow since July 2000.

The NIS continued to work closely with the GP Branch of DHAC during 2000, especially with staff from the Research and Quality and the Division Sections. 2000 was the final year of the initial NIS contract, which commenced in 1995.

Libby Kalucy took on the role as Manager from July 2000, providing enormous vision and leadership to the NIS. With Libby's expertise and commitment we were able to negotiate a new three-year contract with the Research and Quality Section and the Division Section of the GP Branch towards the end of 2000. As Director the NIS, I look forward to working closely with Libby and all the staff of the NIS to build on the success of the NIS in the coming years, and helping it to contribute positively to the PHC RED Strategy.

***Professor Louis Pilotto***

Director, National Information Service

Professor of General Practice, Flinders University

The NIS has completed a number of evaluation projects in this period.

### **2000 GPEP Conference**

The 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference organised by the National Information Service was held in Hobart at the Hotel Grand Chancellor on 4&5 May 2000. The theme was *Partnerships, Health and Communities: General Practice and Primary Health Care in the New Millennium*. This was the final GPEP Conference, with the closure of the General Practice Evaluation Program, and provided an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of GPEP. Delegates also heard about developments in primary health care in USA from Barbara Starfield and in New Zealand from Lannes Johnson, and then heard a vivid account from Renee Bauer and Tim Denton of the delivery of primary health care in a remote Aboriginal Community of Maningrida.

A wide range of people interested in general practice and primary health care research and evaluation attended the conference, making a total of 210 delegates from every state and territory in Australia. Once again there was a small number of overseas participants.

The varied conference program included posters, papers and workshops. One hundred and six abstracts were presented as posters or papers, reflecting quality and diversity in current GPEP funded research. Over the two days of the conference, ten workshops and seminars were held. Topics included: equity and health care; measuring the effectiveness of primary care; collation of GP data; ethical issues of handling data for research and audit; using Medicare, PBS and BEACH datasets for general practice research; obtaining research funding; how to make general practice research multi-disciplinary; best practice in maternity care; and practical examples of projects in integration of population-based community care in New Zealand. The conference proceedings were published and distributed to delegates in October.

### **1998–99 Annual Survey of Divisions**

As in the previous year, the NIS undertook the analysis of data from the 1998–99 Annual Survey of Divisions, which the NIS distributed on CDrom for completion electronically. This year there was a 100% response rate (n=123) as a result of the combined efforts of the NIS, State Offices of the Commonwealth, and Divisions of General Practice. The survey analysis was completed in time for release at the National Divisions Forum in August 2000 titled *Diverse*

*Divisions: A report of the 1998–99 Annual Survey of Divisions.* The publication was widely distributed to Divisions, State-Based Organisations (SBOs), State Offices (SOs) and other stakeholders. Findings were presented to a DHAC seminar in Canberra in September.

The Survey aimed to describe Divisions current activities in the areas of infrastructure, membership and representation; external funding; support for consumer and community access, integration, health promotion and disease prevention, education, monitoring and evaluation. Divisions of General Practice were required for the first time, to report on several Standard Data Items. The Survey covered the period of transition between project funding and Outcomes-Based block grant funding. The results reinforce Divisions' consolidation as stable organisations, with sound organisational infrastructure and membership base, involved in a wide range of collaborative activities at local, state and national level. Since 1997-98 Divisions reported considerable increase in practice accreditation, immunisation and IT activity, illustrating responsiveness of Divisions to external trends. More detailed evaluation (such as that conducted by Rogers and Veale 1999) is required to fully understand the changes identified during this survey.

### **Primary Health Care and General Practice: a scoping report**

The GP Branch of DHAC requested that NIS prepare this report, which was completed by Wendy Rogers and Bronnie Veale in March 2000. The first part of the report describes areas of similarity and difference between primary health care and general practice. The second part identifies issues to be addressed in any shift from general practice towards primary health care. The third part provides some case studies of research and programs both within and without a primary health care focus.

This report was distributed widely, and was available at the GPEP Conference in Hobart in May 2000. Wendy Rogers presented the findings at a seminar in Canberra in June 2000; Libby Kalucy used the report in an invited presentation at the National Divisions Forum in Brisbane in August 2000. Due to the extent of interest, the NIS had distributed 500 copies from the initial print run of this report by the end of 2000. As well as considerable verbal feedback which was very positive, 16 feedback forms were received. The great majority of comments were positive, viewing the report as comprehensive, easy to understand and well presented. However, one urban Division of General Practice wrote a letter which concluded that

*In our view GPs are already extensively involved in primary health care, however their contributions are poorly documented and researched. For GPs to participate in such research they will require additional infrastructure – time, energy, skills and technology. Divisions are not presently funded to provide such essential infrastructure.*

The second stage of this report was prepared in the second half of 2000. After consultation with DHAC Research and Quality Section, the NIS agreed to:

- review the Australian and relevant international literature in the areas of general practice and integration, health care teams, and health promotion/disease prevention. This review would draw upon existent Australian work performed by the Integration and Health Promotion SERUs (amongst other sources) with the aim of drawing out specific strategies rather than replicating their work.
- identify the major barriers to increased GP involvement/activity in the current Australian context
- identify strategies to overcome these barriers.

This second stage was completed in December 2000. The two parts of this study will be prepared together for printing and distribution, when responses have been received from the Commonwealth.

### **Quality review / audit of GPEP data holdings**

This audit was conducted by the NIS in order to assess the subject areas covered by the body of GPEP funded research, and the quality of projects commenced and completed between 1997 and 1999 in terms of the validity of the study findings. Stage one of the report described and classified all final reports of GPEP funded projects using three frameworks (GPEP evaluation framework, national health priority areas and the quadrant framework). Methodological aspects of GPEP research projects have been addressed within several previous NIS reports. This audit aims to contribute and build on previous work in an effort to encourage and foster general practice research that is significant, innovative and of a high quality.

A presentation on the quality of recent GPEP research was given at the Australian Association of Academic General Practice (AAAGP) Meeting in Hobart in May 2000 and to DHAC, Canberra in June. Posters were presented at the GPEP Conference in May and at the regional World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA) Conference in Auckland in June. The final report *The Scope of General Practice Evaluation Program Research: an audit of completed projects 1997-1999*, is a detailed quality assessment of projects begun and completed between 1997 and 1998 using a quality template developed by the NIS.

The audit showed that projects covered a wide range of subject areas and used a variety of methods reflecting the complex issues involved in general practice. The projects also

emphasise the exploration of issues from a variety of perspectives including that of consumers, and on achieving a common understanding of those issues.

Relative gaps in the subject areas of the GPEP evaluative framework were the financial aspects of general practice, ethical, professional and legal aspects, and research into the supply and distribution of general practitioners.

Projects included both qualitative and quantitative methods, and researchers paid considerable attention to using appropriate and adequate methods. While a number of studies achieved a high standard of methodological rigour, the methods in others could have been enhanced by attention to a number of methodological issues.

## **Investigation of NIS holdings that pertain to GP Strategy Review Recommendations 165 and 166**

This NIS project aimed to:

- describe the nature and extent of involvement by consumers and non-clinicians in GPEP funded research and related activities
- to identify documented barriers and incentives to their involvement in these activities
- and to examine the factors which affect the involvement of this group from the perspective of key informants.

Stage 1 of the project involved a literature review and content analysis of relevant documents. A draft report titled *Multidisciplinary Myths: Where are the consumers in general practice research? Participation of non-clinicians and consumers in general practice research* was forwarded to GP Branch in early March for comments. A poster on these findings was presented at the GPEP Conference in May, together with a workshop resulting from a series of structured interviews with key informants. A poster on Stages 1 and 2 was presented at the regional WONCA meeting in Auckland in June.

The final report, *Consumers and Non-Clinical Researchers in General Practice Research, Evaluation and Development*, was published by the NIS in September 2000. The value of consumer collaboration in health research is well documented, and since its inception GPEP has strongly encouraged the participation of non-clinical researchers and consumers. However, in a decade of Australian general practice research this objective is yet to be achieved in a significant way. In 163 completed GPEP studies, researchers included 207 GPs, 185 non-clinicians, but only 12 consumers. The contribution of consumers was overwhelmingly as research subjects.

## **Anthology of Literature Reviews by GPEP Researchers, Volume 2**

Researchers spend a considerable amount of time and effort in preparing a literature review in the final report of a research project. This anthology, *An Anthology of Literature Reviews by GPEP Researchers, Volume 2*, was produced following an earlier volume, in order to disseminate the results of this work. The anthology included GPEP projects initiated during 1997–98, for which a final report had been received by the NIS. Eleven of the thirteen eligible reports had reviews suitable for inclusion in the anthology, which was organised according to GPEP key evaluative areas. These literature reviews cover the areas of practice organisation, quality, education/training, and ethical/professional/legal. The final report, which included a paper on how to undertake effective literature reviews, was published in April and released at the GPEP Conference in May. It has been distributed widely to all NIS stakeholders.

## **Decade of GPEP projects 1990–1999**

The *Decade of GPEP Projects, 1990-1999* provides a comprehensive overview of ten years of GPEP-funded research, in which 248 projects were funded. The NIS analysed all GPEP projects completed or commenced between 1990 and 1999, using five different analytical frameworks. These were the GPEP evaluation framework, the 1999 International year of Older Persons, the National Health Priority Areas, the quadrant framework for focus of GP activity, and finally, the methodological approach.

The report demonstrates the broad scope of GPEP research, the variety of specific health issues addressed, and the range of researchers involved from different disciplines, clinical, non-clinical and consumers.

The report was published in April and released at the GPEP Conference in May. It was distributed widely to all NIS stakeholders, and has been very well received as a useful summary of GPEP research.

Our current evaluation activities include the following:

### **1999–2000 Annual Survey of Divisions**

Distributing this survey was an addition to the current Business Plan in September 2000. In consultation with the Divisions Section of the GP Branch of DHAC, the NIS refined the wording of some survey items. The Survey was then distributed to 123 Divisions on CDrom in October with a closing date of December 2000. Divisions with additional reporting tasks because of MAHS were granted an extension until 14 February 2001. By 28 February 2001, 95 Divisions had completed and returned their surveys. Data entry and analysis will take place in the next contract period.

### **Evaluation of the NIS Help Desk**

The NIS undertook an evaluation of the NIS Help Desk, which provides telephone support for people using NIS electronic products, in September 2000 to determine its effectiveness and inform future development. This evaluation was conducted by a new NIS staff member, who had a fresh objective approach to the evaluation. The evaluation involved interviews with key NIS staff members as well as with the main users of the Help Desk. The key findings were that awareness of the Help Desk role was high among key stakeholders, and the great majority considered the service to be highly responsive and effective for users. The evaluation report will be available in March 2001.

### **Priorities for general practice and primary health care research evaluation and development**

The PHC RED Program included the identification of research priorities as a key element. DHAC commissioned the NIS to conduct a process to identify priorities for general practice research evaluation and development, in a separate contract towards the end of 2000. The process was based on a proposal developed by the Research, Evaluation and Development (RED) subgroup of GPPAC, and the NIS worked in close consultation with staff from the Research and Quality Section of DHAC. In December, the NIS developed and conducted a survey of stakeholders and called for public submissions. The NIS summarised the results of the surveys and submissions, and organised two general and one rural workshop which were conducted in February. Associate Professor Judith Dwyer from La Trobe University facilitated these workshops with great skill. The process will continue in March with a National Consensus workshop. The final report will be ready in June 2001.

### NIS databases

Development and provision of effective tools for data collection, storage and dissemination is a key role of the IT team in the NIS. In addition to maintaining and updating the existing GPEP database, a major achievement in 2000 was the release of the Suite of NIS Databases. The Suite included the first database containing the strategic and business plans of 100 Divisions of General Practice, another containing the transitional plans of Divisions of General Practice during the transition to OBF, and the more familiar GPEP and Divisions Projects databases.

To ensure the quality of the information in NIS databases, new keywords were added to the list of 'Controlled Subject Keyword Headings' during October, and were implemented during November through re-cataloguing of the GPEP, Divisions, Transitional and Activities of Divisions (AOD) databases.

The databases are being made available in a variety of forms, to suit the needs of users. The NIS team is working towards making all databases available to be searched on-line. Currently the NIS provides:

- databases on CDrom in searchable format
- updates on the NIS website for users to download into their own computers
- entire databases which can be viewed on the NIS website (but not yet with on-line searching)
- responses to enquiries from users who do not have the facilities to use the databases themselves.

### GPEP database

The GPEP database has been continually updated as final reports are received from GP Branch. As of February 26 there were 248 projects on the database, 183 of which have been completed (ie the NIS has copies of the final reports). Summaries of progress and final reports received from Canberra have been entered into the database and keywords assigned to assist searching of the database. Updated information was included in the August release on CDrom of the Suite of NIS Databases. Subsequent updates were included in the December release of the Suite of NIS Databases on the NIS Website.

## **Divisions Projects database**

This database contains details of Divisions projects undertaken from 1993 to 1998 before the advent of outcomes-based funding. No new data is expected as this method of funding Divisions is no longer being used. The re-cataloguing of the previous Divisions keywords was completed during November, and was included in the December update.

## **Transitional Divisions database**

This database has been formed from the data provided in the transitional plans written by 102 Divisions which were not included as pilot Divisions for OBF in 1998. A pilot version was demonstrated at the GPEP Conference in May. After data were cleaned and keywords assigned, the database was rigorously tested. Numerous search options are available. Search results can be viewed on screen, printed or exported into Word. This database was released in August as part of the Suite of NIS Databases.

## **Activities of Divisions database**

A prototype version was made available for testing at the GPEP Conference in May. Piloting with six Divisions commenced in June. The NIS modified the database in response to survey findings from these Divisions. The NIS greatly appreciates the time and effort of pilot Divisions in providing feedback about search options, information retrieval, navigation, help information etc.

Despite some delays in the NIS receiving template files, in mid-August the final version was distributed on CDrom to all Divisions, DHAC offices, SBOs and other relevant organisations as part of Version 1.0 of the Suite of NIS Databases.

Release of this database was the result of much effort by Divisions and SOs in providing the data on the template, and by the NIS staff in developing and refining the template, and in cleaning, cataloguing and preparing a searchable database.

The cleaning and cataloguing process commenced again in September with annual reports (1999–2000) and updated strategic and business plans for 2000–2001. In December, updated information from 40 annual reports was incorporated into the Suite of NIS Databases on the NIS website.

The NIS aims to produce a timely, complete and accurate database. However, for several reasons we have experienced considerable delays in receiving strategic and business plans and annual reports. The NIS will, in future, produce updated versions that are timely, rather than waiting many months to achieve completeness. Planning for a review of the form and function of the template and database commenced in January 2001, to resolve issues around data collection, transfer, storage and dissemination.

## **OBF reporting template**

The new version of the OBF Template - Version 3.0 in Visual Basic 6.0, was distributed to all Divisions on CDrom in February, accompanied by a comprehensive help information booklet. Divisions who had previously submitted business and strategic plans on the Version 2.01 template had their data converted and returned to them for checking and editing on the CDrom.

Following feedback from Divisions, two update modules have subsequently been created and distributed to Divisions on floppy disk. The most sought after feature was the ability to copy plans within the template.

The NIS has received positive feedback about the new template. Divisions like the easier navigation and the reports that can be created in Word. New versions of the template were made available on the NIS Website, with e-mail messages informing Divisions of their availability.

In September 2000, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care began to implement a budget initiative providing MAHS in rural regions. After extensive consultations with Divisions Section of DHAC, the NIS incorporated MAHS functionality into the existing OBF Template. The modified template was piloted with two SA, one QLD and one NSW Division of General Practice during November, and their feedback was incorporated, where possible, into the final version. Further refinements and alterations, such as modification to the financial spreadsheet and annotated Standard Data Items, were included in the new version of the template. This was released as the MAHS Version 3.7 via e-mail and the website in December 2000 to all eligible MAHS Divisions, State Offices, SBOs and DHAC. Since the release, further modifications have been made in response to requests from staff of DHAC Divisions section.

## **Workshops**

NIS staff conducted workshops on the Version 3.0 template in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney during the reporting period. These workshops provided a valuable opportunity not only to demonstrate the template, but for NIS staff to meet people familiar from Help Desk phone calls, for Divisions staff to provide feedback to the NIS about the template, and for the NIS to demonstrate a pilot version of the Suite of NIS Databases.

NIS staff also visited the Adelaide Hills Division of General Practice in August to address a number of difficulties with the OBF Template. The site visit helped to improve skills with the OBF Template and set up good communication links between the Division and the NIS.

NIS staff demonstrated the NIS databases and templates at the GPEP Conference in May and the National Divisions Forum in August, where many stakeholders became more familiar with these products and their potential.

National Information Service  
**National Information Service  
Help Desk**

1800 025 882

Frustrated? confused? or just curious!



For expert assistance free call the Help Desk for information and advice about the use of the National Information Service databases and electronic resources.

### **Aims of the Help Desk**

The NIS Help Desk toll free telephone service commenced operation on Monday 16 August 1999. It is staffed between 9.00am and 5.30pm EST Monday to Friday and an answering machine is activated out of business hours. The aim of the Help Desk is to assist Divisions, SBOs and other stakeholders as determined by DHAC in the use of the NIS databases and other electronic reporting products. This service aims to be timely, flexible, and responsive and the NIS has set a performance target so that 80% of the help desk queries will be resolved within 24 hours of a request. The NIS also provides regular feedback to clients on queries that take longer than 24 hours to finalise.

## Functions of the Help Desk

- 1 To log problems encountered during the piloting of prototype electronic resources and to provide assistance with resolving these.
- 2 To assist callers with general enquiries about the content, structure, use and availability of NIS databases and electronic resources.
- 3 To assist callers with advice on :
  - downloading databases, electronic templates and survey instruments from the NIS Website
  - copying and transmitting of data and use of and access to CDrom applications
  - the use of electronic resources including error messages, data input or retrieval and transmission difficulties, etc
  - search techniques including identifying appropriate databases for particular searches, help in refining search parameters and selection of appropriate key words
  - minimum hardware and software requirements needed for effective use of NIS databases and electronic products, and ways to access these.

## Support for Divisions and other stakeholders using NIS electronic products

Adding to the comprehensive help information booklet, the template Help information was revised to include the additional MAHS features and distributed to all eligible MAHS Divisions, state offices of DHAC, and state-based organisations.

## Help Desk for Divisions, SBOs, SOs and other stakeholders

The Help Desk continued to provide an important service to Divisions, DHAC, SBOs and other stakeholders who need assistance with NIS databases and other electronic reporting products.

From January to December 2000 the Help Desk logged 1047 calls on the 1800 free number. These have covered the majority of functions for which we are able to provide assistance. The most common problems have related to use of the OBF Template and the new Suite of NIS Databases. We have received a number of calls relating to the use of the reporting template, as annual reports were required by DHAC to be submitted on the OBF Template for the first time in August. The release of the 1999-00 Annual Survey of Divisions and the MAHS modifications to the template also generated a number of calls.

## Evaluation of Help Desk

In accordance with the 2000 Business Plan, an Evaluation/Review of the NIS Help Desk service was conducted during September–October 2000 by a new NIS staff member who was able to combine external objectivity with increasing familiarity with NIS functions. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the Help Desk effectiveness and usefulness, as well as identify areas for improvement in order to plan for future development.

A combination of methods was used including semi-structured face-to-face interviews, database analysis and a short telephone survey, with more than fifty users or potential users. A broad range of stakeholders were involved including staff of the NIS Help Desk service, DHAC Central and State Offices, SBOs and a random sample of staff (n=32) from Divisions of General Practice.

The evaluation results indicate the Help Desk service is effectively meeting its performance target of providing a response to each call within 24 hours. The majority of participants surveyed reported finding the Help Desk useful. The personalised nature of the service emerged as a key aspect of its usefulness. This aspect contributed to users' feeling understood, an identification of their problems, and timely resolution of their concerns. The majority of participants surveyed were also very satisfied with the service. Factors such as the high dependability of the service, the expertise, patience, professionalism of the staff and the timely responsiveness to inquiries contributed to this outcome. Recommendations from the evaluation include:

- the NIS continue to refine and improve processes in response to stakeholder feedback
- the design of the call register should be reviewed in order to adequately meet service planning and evaluation needs
- strategies that will improve access to workshops and/or workshop content (such as *eTraining* through the world wide web) should be developed by NIS in consultation with Division staff, and other stakeholders
- a review of the OBF Template in terms of its utility and functionality as a planning and reporting tool for Division staff should be conducted by the NIS in 2001, in consultation with stakeholders
- the current mode of delivery of service (ie personalised) and staffing levels of the Help Desk service should be maintained.

## Response to user feedback

In response to informal user feedback *Frequently Asked Questions* and *Template Tips* are now being included in *GPInfonet* and on the NIS website on a regular basis.

## Website

The redesign of the NIS Website was completed in March. The new format is more user-friendly and provides more information and features than its predecessor. The homepage was modified to allow better navigation, with four links to important sections of the NIS website – *What's New*, *Site Map*, *About NIS* and *E-mail alert service* for users to sign up for alerts regarding updates to the NIS website. Numerous additional reciprocal links were established, as well as maintaining all links in terms of currency and accuracy. A number of publications and announcements are available on the website, including the newsletter *GPInfonet* and *JournalWatch*.

Vicki Sellick, Webmaster, has made a number of recommendations to be examined as part of a review of the NIS website to be conducted early in 2001.

## Links to sites on the Internet

The master list of online links found throughout the NIS Website is shown below, with the links grouped according to category. All links have an annotation about their content, as well as an indication of when they were last updated. The annotation can be viewed by clicking on the information icon next to the link.

### Link categories

Clinical general practice	Australian and International Websites that are specifically aimed at practising general practitioners.
Clinical guidelines	Australian and International Websites that provide information about clinical guidelines.
General practice organisations	The Australian Websites for general practice organisations. Subcategories are Divisions, Government and Non-Government organisations.
General practice research	Australian and International Websites that contain information and links specific to general practice research. Subcategories are evidence-based medicine and health outcomes.
Rural health	Australian Websites that contain information relevant to Australian rural general practice and rural health issues.
Indigenous health	Australian Websites that contain information about indigenous health issues.

Mental health	Australian and International Websites that contain information relevant to mental health and mental health issues.
Population & public health	Australian and International Websites that contain information relevant to public and population health issues.
Information technology	Australian and International Websites that contain relevant Information Management and Information Technology facts and issues.
General health	These Websites contain information about a variety of health areas and issues, particularly consumer information. Subcategories are Australian and International.
Libraries and links	Australian and International Websites that are virtual medical libraries or provide a list of links to medical resources.
Databases	Websites that specifically contain a database of information, statistics or data that is searchable on-line or available for download.
Journals	Australian and International Websites of reputable medical and health journals.

The National Information Service has completed a number of reports in this period.

### ***GPinfonet***

In 2000, five issues of *GPinfonet* were produced by the NIS and distributed nationally, due to a change from quarterly to bi-monthly release. *GPinfonet* contains information on GPEP, NIS activities, completed GPEP research projects, conferences, and Divisional matters particularly dealing with template and database issues.

### ***NIS JournalWatch***

During 2000 this has evolved from the NIS monitoring the contents pages of relevant journals into a brief publication made available every two months on the NIS website, providing a synopsis of current journal articles relevant to primary health care research. It is still developing, and will benefit from critical feedback from our users.

### ***Diverse Divisions: a report of the 1998-99 Annual Survey of Divisions***

The report indicates that Divisions, at the onset of outcomes-based block grant funding, are substantial organisations. They have multiple links to other health services and community groups, implementing a wide variety of activities for maintenance and development of accessible general practice services, education of GPs, and health promotion.

### ***Primary Health Care and General Practice: a scoping report***

This report aims to clarify some of the similarities and differences between primary health care and general practice. The term 'primary health care' (PHC) gained widespread currency following the 1978 International Conference on Primary Health Care held by the WHO and UNICEF at Alma-Ata. This report discusses the kinds of changes in policy and organisation that would be necessary in order to shift health services away from a medical model towards a primary health care model. A series of case studies demonstrates examples in current practice of medical and primary health care models of research and programs.

## ***An Anthology of Literature Reviews by GPEP Researchers, Volume 2***

This report is an update of our popular Anthology of Literature Reviews by GPEP Researchers. The eleven reviews covered in this report come from GPEP projects which were initiated during 1997-8, and for which the NIS had received final reports containing suitable reviews. A collection such as this contributes to an understanding of the role of GPs and general practice in the Australian health care system. In addition, it provides a valuable resource for general practice researchers. It also includes an overview on how to conduct a literature review. This describes the reasons for conducting a review, and the steps in undertaking and writing up a review, including developing search strategies. The list of references will help new researchers to find further information.

## ***Decade of GPEP Projects, 1990-1999***

We have now completed ten years of GPEP funded research. This publication brings together all the projects funded under GPEP, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the body of research. We have included projects in progress, identified abandoned projects, and completed projects. In order to describe the scope of the research as broadly as possible, we have used three classification frameworks: the General Practice Evaluation Program Framework; National Health Priority Areas; and the quadrant framework for focus of general practice activity. We hope that this will make it easier and simpler for researchers and other interested stakeholders to find out which research has been conducted and by whom.

## ***Proceedings of the 2000 GPEP Conference***

Theme: *Partnerships, Health and Community: General Practice and Primary Health Care in the New Millennium*

The proceedings contain plenary session addresses, workshop presentations and poster abstracts, as well as an evaluation of the conference based on feedback from participants regarding the conference organisation and content. These comprehensive accounts of the GPEP conferences are a useful resource for general practitioners, consumers and researchers.

## ***The Scope of General Practice Evaluation Program Research***

The NIS undertook this audit in order to assess the subject areas covered, and methods used, by GPEP research completed between 1997 and 1999, to identify gaps in subject areas covered and to describe methodological strengths and weaknesses.

## ***Consumers and Non-Clinical Researchers in General Practice Research, Evaluation and Development***

The NIS has recently completed research into the extent of involvement of non-clinicians and consumers in general practice research, evaluation and development. The research was based upon Recommendations 165 and 166 of the General Practice Strategy Review (1998).

## **PUBLICATION CATALOGUE OF THE NATIONAL INFORMATION SERVICE**

### ***National Information Service of the General Practice Evaluation Program \*\*UPDATED\*\****

This booklet outlines the roles of GPEP and the National Information Service. It provides up to date information on the activities of the NIS and the resources it provides, as well as the names of all the NIS staff and other resource contacts.

### ***GPinfonet***

*GPinfonet* is the newsletter of the General Practice Evaluation Program, produced by the NIS. It provides up-to-date information on GPEP and NIS activities, as well as forthcoming conferences and GPEP grant rounds. There has been a focus on the electronic dissemination by the NIS of general practice research information. *GPinfonet* has also focused on Divisional matters, reflecting the NIS's increasing involvement in Divisional issues. In addition, we include articles from our audience on matters pertaining to general practice research.

### ***Dynamic Divisions: A report of the 1997-98 Annual Survey of Divisions***

The report of the 1997-98 Annual Survey of Divisions documents the growing profile of Divisions and their range of activities in the community. The move to block grant funding has been accompanied by many positive effects. These include the introduction of long term programs related to local health needs, which are well supported by members, and a growing recognition of the community role of Divisions. Activities in this period have been characterised by the formation of strategic alliances between Divisions and other elements of the health care system, with increased integration and partnership with primary health care services and community groups.

### ***An Anthology of Literature Reviews by GPEP Researchers***

This anthology of literature reviews has been compiled from completed projects which were funded by GPEP. This anthology contributes to an understanding of the role of GPs and general practice in the Australian health care system and should provide a valuable resource for general practice researchers. The themes covered in these literature reviews represent a

broad cross-section of issues relevant to contemporary general practice in Australia. Many of these are central themes of the General Practice Strategy, of which GPEP is an integral part.

### ***Considering Quality***

This report is an assessment of 40 GPEP projects identified as investigating quality in general practice that were completed between 1990 and 1996. The report addresses methodological issues and examples of best practice in research, summarises and disseminates key findings from GPEP projects investigating quality in general practice. The evaluated projects have contributed both to an understanding of the distinctive place of general practice in the health care system and to the conceptualisation of quality in general practice.

### ***Instruments used in General Practice Research and Evaluation in General Practice***

The aim of this publication is to provide a resource for researchers in Australian general practice - both within and beyond GPEP. It arose from our observation that GPEP projects have produced a wealth of research instruments whose use needs to be maximised. It is frequently noted that researchers in general practice, in common with other areas of research, fail to build on previous work. For example, a proposed research project using focus group discussions would ideally examine the experiences of previous researchers using this method. If duplication of effort is to be avoided, existing instruments should be adapted and tested in different settings in order to assess their applicability and capacity to generate further useful information. New methodologies for research and evaluation in general practice should continue to be developed. This exercise should promote the concept of building on existing strengths rather than risking ignoring what has gone before and duplicating effort.

### ***Strategic Evaluation of Divisions of General Practice***

This evaluation, commissioned by the Divisions Evaluation Advisory Group, describes the changes occurring in Divisions' priorities and activities associated with the change to outcomes-based block grant funding. The evaluation compares the activities and expenditure of twenty-seven Divisions in 1996-97 with activities and expenditure in 1998-99, looking at changes with regard to NHPAs and other nominated areas, and changes in the ways in which Divisions prioritised areas for expenditure. The evaluation also examined differences between Divisions already receiving outcomes-based funding and Divisions which are on transitional funding with regard to their preparation strategies, their use of proposed frameworks and the ways in which Divisions prioritised their activities. Based upon the findings of this evaluation, eight recommendations were made, regarding necessary supports to

Divisions to facilitate the transition to OBF. We hope that you find this report both interesting and useful.

***Linking General Practice with Population Health: report on GPEP projects investigating population health in general practice***

This report demonstrates the links between general practice and population health in research funded by GPEP. Prior to the GP Strategy Review, population health was not an identified priority for this program; however, during the period 1992-98, there was considerable activity in the program which contributes to our understanding of the role of general practice in population health. This review supplies one link in the connection between general practice and population health. There is also a need to evaluate the population health work of Divisions of General Practice and to situate this work within the international literature. Our recommendations are crafted to help indicate future steps.

***Profile of Completed GPEP Projects, 1996-1997***

A companion publication to the 1990-1995 Profile (described below), this contains a profile of GPEP projects completed between 1996-1997.

***Profile of Completed GPEP Projects, 1990-1995***

This is a profile of GPEP projects completed between 1990-1995. A descriptive overview, summarised with minimal interpretation, is provided. This publication allows a rapid understanding of the scope of the program and its achievements. It is a useful document for all those who have been involved in GPEP's past and present activities.

***Summaries of Divisions Projects, 1993-1996***

This is an updated overview of research funded through the Divisions Program since its inception and includes three hundred and fifty-seven projects approved from the 1996 round, as at December 1996. (Projects from the 1996 round approved since December 1996 have not been included.) As in the companion book, a brief summary of the aims of the projects is provided.

***Summaries of Divisions Projects, 1993-1995***

This publication provides an overview of research funded through the Divisions Program over the three years. A brief summary of the aims of each project is provided, making this a valuable resource for all those interested in research and service activities in general practice.

### ***Collaborative Consumer Workshop on GP Research and Evaluation***

In order to foster collaborative research between consumers and general practice researchers, a workshop was held in October 1996. The workshop was a joint venture between the Consumers' Health Forum of Australia, the National Information Service and the GP Branch of the Department of Health and Family Services. The workshop highlighted the gains to be made from consumers and GP researchers working collaboratively. This document outlines the proceedings of the Collaborative Consumer Workshop. The workshop was a starting point in looking more closely at the issues and opportunities of collaborative partnerships in research.

### ***Report of Activities 1998-2000***

This comprehensive report highlights our major activities in the areas of research and evaluation, electronically based activities in collection, storage and dissemination of information, and our ever-expanding library of NIS publications. The Report reflects our engagement with current issues in general practice. We have completed evaluation projects on: OBF funding for Divisions; the Annual Survey of Divisions; the role of population health in GPEP research; and the relationship between primary health care and general practice. Our IT team has produced and released Version 3 of the OBF Template, as well as maintaining the NIS databases, updating and improving our website and starting work on new databases from transitional plans. Our current list of publications covers everything you ever wanted to know about general practice research in Australia!

### ***Proceedings of the General Practice Evaluation Program Conference***

The proceedings contain plenary session addresses, workshop presentations and poster abstracts, as well as an evaluation of the conference based on feedback from participants regarding the conference organisation and content. These comprehensive accounts of the GPEP conferences are a useful resource for general practitioners, consumers and researchers. The themes of the conferences are as follows:

2000: Partnerships, Health and Community: General Practice and Primary Health Care in the New Millennium

1999: Pathways to Quality in General Practice

1998: Forging Ahead - Facing the Future

1997: Challenges and Solutions

1996: A 3D Perspective on General Practice Evaluation - Diversity, Divisions and Dissemination

1995: Dissemination

### **Seminars and workshops held by the NIS**

OBF Template Workshops for DHAC, February, March & September 2000

NIS Seminars for DHAC, June & September 2000

2000 GPEP Conference, May 2000

### **Training workshops attended by NIS staff**

Certificate IV Training Small Groups, Onkaparinga TAFE, August 2000

WebCT Workshops 1-5, Flinders University, June 2000

Health Inequalities, Adelaide University, 2000

Aboriginal Health Policy, Adelaide University, 2000

Public Health Law, Adelaide University, 2000

Web Application Development using InterDev 6, Aspect Computing, November 2000

Introduction to Word, Flinders University, June 2000

Manipulating Graphic in Word, Flinders University, November 2000

Using Word Templates, Flinders University, November 2000

### **Seminars and workshops attended by NIS staff**

RACGP 10<sup>th</sup> Computer Conference, February 2000

2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Primary Health Care 2000, April 2000

National Meeting of the Australian Association of General Practice, May 2000

WONCA Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2000 & RNZCGP Annual Conference, June 2000

Australian Coordinated Care Trials: USA Study Tour, June 2000

CHETRE: Health Inequalities Research Collaboration Workshop, July 2000

Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Workshop, July 2000

Health Outcomes for the National, August 2000

National Divisions Forum, August 2000

Australian Evaluation Conference, August 2000

Fifth World Congress on Bioethics, September 2000

National Demonstration Hospitals Program – Phase 3, October 2000

Sixth International Congress of Behavioural Medicine, November 2000

Population Health and General Practice Seminar, November 2000

Public Health Association of Australia Conference, November 2000

Disability Adjusted Life Years Workshop, December 2000

Primary Health Care Research Institute Workshop, December 2000

Calvary Hospital Ethics Conference, December 2000

### Abstracts

#### 2000 GPEP Conference

National Information Service 2000. *Publications of the National Information Service*. Poster presented at 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference, Hobart, 4-5 May.

National Information Service 2000. *The National Information Service Website*. Poster presented at 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference, Hobart, 4-5 May.

Lyons G, Rogers W, Siegmann K, Magarey A, Veale B, Raupach J 2000. *Multidisciplinary Myths: Where are the Consumers in General Practice Research?* Paper presented at 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference, Hobart, 4-5 May.

Raupach J, Lyons G, Rogers W, Veale B 2000. *Improving the Quality of General Practice Research*. Paper presented at 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference, Hobart, 4-5 May.

Rogers W, Veale B 2000. *Primary Health Care and General Practice: What's in a name?* Paper presented at 2000 General Practice Evaluation Program Conference, Hobart, 4-5 May.

#### WONCA 2000

Magarey A, Lyons G, Rogers W, Siegmann K, Veale B 2000. *Non-clinician and Consumer Involvement in General Practice Research, Evaluation and Development*. Paper presented at WONCA Asia Pacific Regional Conference and RNZCGP Annual Conference, Christchurch, 20-24 June.

Raupach J, Rogers W, Veale B 2000. *Quality in General Practice Research in Australia*. Paper presented at WONCA Asia Pacific Regional Conference and RNZCGP Annual Conference, Christchurch, 20-24 June.

#### OTHER CONFERENCES

Raupach J, Lyons G, Rogers W, Veale B 2000. *Identifying the gaps: an audit of general practice research*. Poster presented at Health Outcomes Conference, Canberra, 2-3 August.

Kalucy L, Esterman A 2000. *Evaluating coordinated care: finding out what has worked*. Paper.

Kalucy L, Esterman A, Heard A, Clark R 2000. *Health outcomes and chronic disease management*. Pre-conference workshop.

Kalucy L 2000. *Divisions and Primary Health Care: what's the relationship?* Paper presented at National Divisions Forum, Brisbane, 24-26 August.

Kalucy L 2000. *Two tier evaluation: view from the lower tier – the local evaluation.* Presented as part of a symposium on two tier evaluation, led by Jenni Leigh, KPMG, National Evaluation of Coordinated Care Trials.

## Peer-reviewed articles

Braunack-Mayer AJ, Rogers W 2000. Handling information ethically: some strategies for discussion. *AFP* 2000; 29(10): 1005-1008

Raupach J 2000. *Randomised trials within the General Practice Evaluation Program: why so few?* (under review)

Rogers W, Braunack-Mayer A 2000. Handling information: some ethical issues. *AFP* 2000; 29(8): 806-808

Rogers WA, Veale BM 2000. Dollars, debts and duties: lessons from funding Australian general practice. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 2000; 8(5): 291-297

Veale B 2000. Do guidelines aid diabetes care? Editorial *AFP* 2000; 29(2): 172

Weller DP 2000. R&D in general practice: time to move forward. *MJA* 2000; 173: 668-669

Warin M, Baum F, Kalucy L, Murray C, Veale B 2000. The power of place: space and time in women's and community health centres in South Australia. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50; 1863-1875.

Worley PS, Prideaux DJ, Strasser RP, Silagy CS, Magarey JA 2000. Why we should teach undergraduate medical students in rural communities. *MJA* 2000; 172: 615-617