



PRACTICE CONNECT

A practical forum for Practice Managers and GPs

Message from the Tonic Media Network Editorial Committee*

Welcome to another edition of *Practice Connect*, where Tonic Media Network provides topical news and information for you and your patients. Included in this edition:

Cyber security attacks are growing in size and impact. You may think you're protected but are you really?

The news has been full of one successful and high impact cyber-attack after another in large companies and organisations. Small businesses though have not escaped. They've become a common target and having anti-virus software is insufficient. Criminals no longer need to have hacker level skills to commit cybercrimes.

What can general practices do to improve your cyber security?

Cyber security is everyone's responsibility and all practice staff should be on the lookout for cyber-attacks. Here are some steps you can take to protect your practice and patients' data:

- Secure your networks with strong authentication methods. Using aging security authentication options is a key vulnerability for cyber criminals to access online devices.
- Ensure anti-virus software is installed on all online devices and updated automatically with the latest virus protection definitions.
- Wherever possible, implement multi-factor authentication on your online accounts. Get added verification with codes sent to your phone by SMS or from an authenticator app preventing unauthorised access.
- Keep software and operating systems updated with the latest versions and set software to run regular checks for security patches.
- Train your staff on cyber security awareness. Technology is only a small part of cyber security and the best defence is having staff who are cyber security aware.
- Never leave devices unattended without first locking the screen with password protection.
- Regularly review the quality of access codes and wherever possible use a passphrase instead of a password. Use a random mix of unrelated words to create unpredictable and stronger passphrases.
- Secure and limit the availability of administrative accounts that have full access to systems and services. Those with administrator access need to take additional precautionary security measures including compulsory multi-factor authentication.

- Never respond to unexpected phone calls, emails or text messages. Scammers impersonate government and business to convince people to act. If you aren't sure, do your own research and make contact using publicly listed contact details for the organisation.
- Protect your business with Cyber Insurance tailored to your needs and keep it active.

Learn more: <https://www.mydr.com.au/practice-connect/cyber-security-attacks-are-growing-in-size-and-impact-you-may-think-youre-protected-but-are-you-really/>

The 'silent killer' chronic kidney disease is in your waiting room.

Chronic kidney disease is estimated to affect more than 1.7 million Australians, but nine out of 10 of them are completely unaware they have the condition. The number of people undergoing dialysis and transplants has more than doubled in the past two decades, and as COVID-19 emerges as a new risk factor, experts say the need for early detection has never been more important. Kidney damage increases the risk of premature death, amplifying the damage done by heart disease.

Almost 15,000 Australians are currently on dialysis, and modelling from Australia's Dialysis and Transplant Registry predicts another 4,000 people could be on dialysis by the end of the decade.

Anyone can develop chronic kidney disease, but one in three Australians are at an increased risk because of diabetes, high blood pressure or lifestyle factors.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Every day, on average, 63 people with kidney disease die in Australia. While the condition affects one in 10 non-Indigenous Australians, First Nations people are twice as likely to develop kidney disease and nearly four times more likely to die with it.

The 2012-13 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Measure Survey (NATSIHMS) indicated that among Aboriginal and Torres Strait adults, 18% had signs of chronic kidney disease. Yet in 2018-19, NATSIHMS found that fewer than 2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people self-reported having kidney disease.

We may see is a further rise in chronic kidney disease because of COVID

Kidney disease has been growing for a while, primarily because we are seeing a big rise in diabetes - the main cause of renal failure. But what we may see is a further rise in chronic kidney disease because of COVID infection. Emerging data suggest that kidney injury is common with COVID, and we know that an episode of kidney injury during an acute illness sets someone up for increased risk of future chronic kidney disease and kidney failure.

Researchers from the University of Queensland recently led a study into acute kidney injury in COVID patients.

According to Professor Karen Dwyer, a kidney specialist, Professor of Medicine at Deakin University and the Clinical Director at Kidney Health Australia, education is key for both members of the public and practitioners.

"Fundamental to all this is to focus again on health and wellbeing. The importance good nutrition, removing ultra-processed foods, addressing the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages which we know impacts so many aspects of someone's health, advocacy on physical activity, stress management, and sleep. All these are fundamental foundational components of management - people can be empowered to self-manage, but they need to be given the right advice," she told the Health Report on ABC Radio National.

Professor Dwyer says acute kidney injury isn't the only risk. COVID can worsen or even increase the risk of developing diabetes, which is the leading risk factor for chronic kidney disease, while some people with long COVID see a decline in kidney function.

Learn more: <https://www.mydr.com.au/practice-connect/the-silent-killer-chronic-kidney-disease-is-in-your-waiting-room/>

The daily 10,000-step target is popular but does it mean anything?

The origins of 10,000 steps as a target for daily walking go back to long before wearables, to the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. In fact, it was core to the advertising campaign for the very first wearable, a pedometer called manpo-kei which means 10,000 metres. The '10,000 steps' message was adopted by manufacturers of wearables as it was easy for people to memorise – and measurable.

It turned out that the marketing ploy of the 1960s has something going for it.

For dementia, 3,800 steps lowered the risk by 25% and 10,000 steps by 50%.

For mortality and cardiovascular disease, the study showed that for every 2,000 steps you get approximately a 10% decrease in risk. The optimal benefit turned out to be around 10,000 steps. Added intensity brought additional benefits over and above the number of steps.

In summary, the research team found that aiming for 10,000 steps a day can lower your risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease and dementia. In addition, upping the pace and workload of your steps through the day can also contribute to better health outcomes.

Learn more: <https://www.mydr.com.au/practice-connect/the-daily-10000-step-target-is-popular-but-does-it-mean-anything/>

Chronic disease management post COVID - optimise your billings in 4 easy steps

The COVID pandemic has meant that some conventional general practice services have taken a back seat. This has led to reduced practice revenue and sadly an increase in undiagnosed patient conditions.

It's now time to do something about this according to the Practice Intelligence Platform provider Cubiko. Around Australia, people are adjusting to the 'new normal' and patients are more willing to attend their local general practice.

Chronic Disease Management (CDM) plays a major role in many practice's operations and procedures for patient care, at times making up 20 – 40%+ of a practice's billings.

Cubiko speaks to general practitioners, practice managers and nurses around the country every day and have developed four steps you can take to optimise your CDM billings.

Learn more: <https://www.cubiko.com.au/blog/increase-your-cdm-billings-in-4-easy-steps/>

Future of General Practice – the Federal Government's priorities

"As the Commonwealth Government, the best thing we can do to alleviate pressure on our hospitals is to rebuild primary care and deal with aged care," said Federal Health Minister, Mark Butler.

Minister Butler made the comments at the recent Future of General Practice Webinar as part of Tonic's

General Practice in a Rapidly Changing World Webinar Series, which was presented in association with the WA Primary Health Alliance.

"If you're really going to alleviate pressure on the hospital system, you have to sort of work out upstream into primary care and prevention and have better systems for particularly vulnerable people, aged care and NDIS and at a time of unprecedented workforce supply pressure across the health system."

"It's not responsible if we continue to have general practitioners, practice nurses, nurse practitioners and pharmacists not working at the top of their scope of practice when the community is crying out for more health services." Minister Butler added.

Minister Butler also recognised the lack of digital health progress over 20 years since the personalised electronic health record was first introduced.

"Digital operations and the level of fragmentation in our system is incredibly frustrating for patients and for provider," the Minister added.

Strengthening Medicare Taskforce

The new Strengthening Medicare Taskforce has been tasked with solving long-standing issues with Medicare. The Federal Government has committed to spending \$750 million to strengthen Medicare over three years, as well as to providing \$220 million in practice infrastructure grants. Groups represented on the taskforce include a wide variety of healthcare organisations such as the Australian Medical Association, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Association and the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

Mark Butler told the Tonic Webinar that the Taskforce has identified four areas where they need to do the deep dive during their work, including voluntary patient enrolment, multidisciplinary care and digital health.

[Watch now](#)

Easy access to vapes for teens

The rise in e-cigarettes has been remarkable over the past few years and it is estimated that 1.2% of Australians now vape. These devices are often marketed as a way to help adults stop smoking conventional cigarettes and are legally only available with nicotine in Australia for adults with a doctor's prescription. Despite this, their rise in popularity is obvious, especially with young people.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 9.3% of people aged 18 years and over have used an e-cigarette or vaping device at least once in their lives.

A [recent study](#) from the University of Sydney looked into how teenagers are able to access e-cigarettes or 'vapes', as well as their patterns of use. The researchers had more than 700 NSW residents between the ages of 14 and 17 complete an online survey, which asked questions about whether or not they vaped or smoked traditional cigarettes, the different types of vaping devices they had used and how they were able to access vapes.. They were also asked demographic questions such as gender, age, whether they lived in an urban or rural setting, and whether they identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

One of the key findings of the study was the relationship between smoking normal cigarettes and vaping is complicated and goes both ways. Those who had smoked cigarettes were 18 times more likely to have vaped, but vaping was not only popular in young people who smoked tobacco cigarettes. It also found that 65% of the participants had never smoked or vaped, and 23% had tried both. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, those who had previously smoked, and the older participants were more likely to vape.

The flavour and price of the vape were rated as the most important features. Of those who had vaped, 70% did not purchase their own vape, with the majority getting them from friends. Of the remainder who did buy their own, they tended to buy them from friends, from shops and petrol stations, and from online sources including social media. Most surveyed said it was very easy to access vapes.

This study has shown vapes are readily accessible and widely used by teens and young people. Their design makes them highly appealing – more so than conventional cigarettes. But they have a complex relationship with cigarettes, with vaping and smoking both putting young people at an increased chance of using the other.

Learn more: <https://www.mydr.com.au/practice-connect/easy-access-to-vapes-for-teens/>