

# Andrology Australia

## *The Australian Centre of Excellence in Male Reproductive Health*

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In recent years, the state of men's health in Australia has received greater attention. This is primarily as a result of statistical comparisons between the health of men compared to that of women with reports of comparatively lower life expectancy<sup>1</sup> and higher risk of more serious health problems such as coronary heart disease and cancer.<sup>2</sup> A growing community interest in men's health has also been fuelled by greater media attention to gender specific health issues, such as the debate around prostate specific antigen (PSA) screening for prostate cancer, the availability of sildenafil, declining sperm counts and the 'male menopause'.

In response to the emergence of men's health as an issue that requires attention, the commonwealth government has funded a range of national initiatives focussing on the health of Australian men.<sup>3</sup> This includes the establishment of Andrology Australia (The Australian Centre of Excellence in Male Reproductive Health) which aims to enhance the awareness of male reproductive health issues by programs directed toward community and professional education. This report describes Andrology Australia's objectives and program of activities.

### **Establishment of Andrology Australia**

Andrology Australia is supported by the Federal Department of Health and Ageing and administered by Monash

University, Melbourne (Victoria). The aim of the program is to improve knowledge and provide much needed education to the Australian public and health professionals on targeted areas of male reproductive health. Key health issues currently being addressed include:

- prostate disease (including prostate cancer)
- testicular cancer
- male infertility
- androgen deficiency, and
- erectile dysfunction.

Andrology Australia operates on a national basis and draws together expertise from around the country to undertake collaborative programs to improve and promote the reproductive health of men. Described as a centre 'without walls', this approach aims to maximise the use of available resources, enhance the education and research effort currently being undertaken and ensure the objectives of the program are sustained in the longer term.

### **Health professional education**

Health professional education is a fundamental component of Andrology Australia's program with significant support being provided for the development of a multifaceted professional education program.

Support has been provided for the development of a distance education course available through the Department

of General Practice at Monash University. The course is an evidence based approach to the management of reproductive health disorders in men. Designed as a short certificate course that may be credited toward Monash's Graduate Diploma or Master's Degree in Family Medicine, it also offers a generous quantum of continuing professional development and clinical audit points for vocationally registered general practitioners.

In conjunction with the Department of General Practice, Monash University, a national approach to the training of GPs is currently underway. With the collaboration from divisions of general practice, a national 'Train-the-Trainer' program is being rolled out across divisions allowing resource people to diffuse key health messages at regional levels. It is expected that up to 1000 GPs across Australia will receive additional training in male reproductive health issues which will include the most up-to-date information presented by specialists as short talks and case based discussions in areas such as PSA testing, confident assessment of men with erectile dysfunction, and diagnosis and management of androgen deficiency.

A series of resources for health professionals is also being developed. A new website ([www.drandrologyaustralia.org](http://www.drandrologyaustralia.org)) has recently been launched to complement the GP training programs and the Andrology Australia public information website. This additional site provides a unique, on-line resource for GPs and other

health professionals and includes journal articles, case studies and other resources to assist with the management of men presenting with sexual and reproductive health issues. In conjunction with the Rural Health Education Foundation, Andrology Australia has also participated in satellite broadcasts to GPs on prostate cancer, androgen deficiency, erectile dysfunction, male infertility and testicular cancer.

With GPs acknowledged as representing the gatekeepers of the health care system in Australia,<sup>4</sup> emphasis has been given in the first instance to professional education at this level. However, there are plans to develop activities and resources to suit other health professionals in the near future.

### Community education program

Complementing the professional program are several community education initiatives. On-line access to quality and evidence based health information suitable for men and their families is available at: [www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org). The information is intended to be educational in nature; to improve understanding and knowledge of the range, causes and treatment options of male reproductive health disorders.

In addition, the findings from a recent information needs analysis undertaken by Andrology Australia will be used to develop, in conjunction with other agencies, a broad education strategy to raise the awareness of male sexual and reproductive health issues in the community and ensure evidence based information is readily available to men affected by reproductive health disorders.

### Discussion

The challenges that exist to improve the reproductive health of Australian men are multifaceted. Lack of accurate prevalence rates, social and cultural restraints, unknown causes or risk factors associated with the development of disease, poor quality and unauthenticated information all contribute

to a lack of preventive action and appropriate services. The provision of evidence based information and education to health professionals and the community is imperative to address some of these challenges.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

### Resources

For more information about Andrology Australia visit the website at: [www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org). To subscribe to a free quarterly newsletter, The Healthy Male, that provides updates on Andrology Australia's program, email: [info@andrologyaustralia.org](mailto:info@andrologyaustralia.org).

### References

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