



Night-time reflections

Improving timely access to doctors, by doctors

Dr Sarah Newman

Assistant Director, Doctors' Health Advisory Service WA

This is an update on the recent work of the Doctors' Health Advisory Service of Western Australia (DHASWA) and the retirement of our online 'Drs for Drs' psychiatry public access list.

I am a nocturnal worrier. Next to my soundly sleeping husband and snoring Staffy, I often ruminate on the bigger picture. Recently, I've been stuck on the service availability we offer doctors. How are we faring? Are we getting doctors into the consult room? In particular, how well does our 'Drs for Drs' list work in the light of day?

Then I think of all the other nights

I've worried about doctors landing on our online list of psychiatrists, finding no availability, being disheartened, or even coming to harm. Of all those GPs seeking support, how many have the frustration of working their way through the list to no avail?

I've arrived at the advice grandfathered to me by a wise, sound-sleeping mentor: if you are worrying about someone at night, it's an indication you should act.

DHASWA is committed to only provide services of utility for our doctors. Despite our efforts to recruit doctors with a self-identified willingness to prioritise doctors, the online public access lists have faced major challenges. We've heard the concerns; the causes are multifactorial – critical psychiatry shortages, closed books, lack of administrative awareness of the special exceptions to the rules of the Doctor/DHASWA referral. We evidently needed to make some hard decisions.

This may be perceived as moving backwards, and even I've had my reservations. But, upon deep nocturnal contemplation and daytime consultation, we believe this move will conversely increase our ability to get a medical professional in need through the doors to a psychiatrist. By focusing on internal assessment and our in-house referral



relationships, DHASWA can triage doctors to make the best use of our most finite resource – the urgent psychiatry review.

Moving forward, DHASWA has decided to retire the psychiatry list from public access, and focus on providing prioritised triage and referral for doctors. Our GP and psychologist lists remain core responses and will be enhanced in the coming months. This new approach ensures timely access to psychiatry, tailored to the nature and urgency of the individual's needs. Doctors seeking psychiatric services are advised to first consult their GPs, who have existing relationships and knowledge of local referral options.

For emergency or acute psychiatric presentations:

individuals or treating practitioners can contact the DHASWA 24/7 Advice Line on **93213098** for assistance within four hours. This service is staffed by senior GPs with extensive experience in doctors' health, with the assistance of our DHASWA psychiatrists. Our team can triage on a case-by-case basis and match patients to the most suitable psychiatry services.

For non-urgent or routine requests: people can contact us at manager@dhaswa.com.au.

Optimising GP access to doctors

It's hard to get a timely appointment with a GP or psychologist these days. We hear you. We're actively recruiting for our continuing 'Drs for Drs' GP and Psychologist programs.

Recognising that DHASWA may still have a long way to go to ensure all doctors have timely access to their preferred doctors, we're developing the 'Doctors' Access Program' – this aims to identify and overcome barriers to accessing community services, and to create bespoke solutions.

Parts of our program will be working with external parties and sourcing funding to recreate pathways to GP care. This may involve offering dedicated regular and on-the-day appointments for emergencies; defining clear pathways for prioritised care; and collaborating with 'doctor-friendly practices' to ensure doctors receive support when they need it.

So, we want to hear from you! We are actively seeking your feedback on doctor access across Western Australia. What are your pressure points? Is there anything keeping you up at night?

We are excited about our future endeavours in finding novel solutions to accessing medical care, and we welcome you to join us and be part of the wider solution.

Soon I hope to sleep soundly, knowing DHASWA has your back in times of need. ■

“ DHASWA is committed to improving timely access to healthcare for doctors. By retiring the psychiatry list and implementing private referral pathways, we aim to address challenges faced by doctors in accessing psychiatric care. We welcome you to join us and be part of the wider solution.

Be part of our 'Drs for Drs' community

DHASWA warmly welcomes new members to join our community of dedicated individuals passionate about prioritising the health of our profession.

Contact us at manager@dhaswa.com.au or subscribe directly to the 'Drs for Drs' list at dhaswa.com.au/drs-for-drs-list.

Give us feedback on your access to seeing a doctor in WA

If you're a doctor, practice or organisation who wants to engage with DHASWA for feedback or assistance, please get in touch.

Email manager@dhaswa.com.au or complete the feedback form at dhaswa.com.au/feedback.



JOIN OUR DRS FOR DRS LIST

Are you passionate about doctors' health?

Doctors come to us in difficulty, in crisis or when well, all seeking a relationship with a trusted GP or clinical psychologist.

We provide them with our Drs for Drs list – a list of WA health professionals who enjoy working for doctors as patients and are willing to prioritise appointments for other doctors.

We are looking for more WA doctors to join this list!

Join our list and you will be provided with DHASWA clinical support, education, peer debriefing and a great community.

- Be that trusted GP
- Join the Drs for Drs list
- Scan the QR code to sign up



08 9321 3098 manager@dhaswa.com.au dhaswa.com.au