

## RHEUMATOLOGY SERVICES

The Access Economics reports published in 2001, estimate that 3.1 million Australians suffer from arthritis (16.5% of the population) and that these people generate 2.2 million specialist visits per annum. In SWSAHS this suggests that 132,000 people have arthritis currently and that this number will rise to 138,964 by 2006. These people would be expected to generate approximately 92,400 specialist visits per annum in 2003 rising to 98,664 visits by 2006. In addition, 1.9 million people in Australia have osteoporosis and 64,514 patients were hospitalised with osteoporotic fractures between 2000/01. By 2006 this number is expected to rise to 78,488 admissions per annum for fractures. This suggests that in SWSAHS up to 80,000 people have osteoporosis and that approximately 3.4% of these will require admission for management of an osteoporotic fracture in 2003. As the population ages, this number is likely to increase, unless preventative measures are taken.

Rheumatology Services in SWSAHS are provided primarily at the Liverpool Hospital and also at Bankstown Hospital. The Rheumatology Service primarily treats non-inpatients.

In 2002/03 SWSAHS provided 309 episodes of care in rheumatology, accounting for 1,245 beddays.

SWSAHS is 66% self-sufficient in rheumatology. Most outflows are to the Royal Prince Alfred Institute of Rheumatology and Orthopaedics, St Vincent's Public Hospital, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Westmead Hospital. The private sector meets 21% of total demand.

Estimates indicate that 132,000 people in SWS are likely to suffer arthritis, rising to 138,964 by 2006. Up to 80,000 people have osteoporosis and 3.4% of these will require admission to hospital. Population growth in SWS and the ageing of the population means that these numbers are likely to increase in the absence of preventative measures. Indeed, the demand for rheumatology services is projected to grow by 20.8% to 2006 and by a further 9.9% to 2011.

In 2006, at 85% occupancy and assuming no change in flow patterns, it is projected that there will be a need for approximately 5.4 rheumatology beds for adults.

### Current Service

Currently the Rheumatology Service manages inflammatory and degenerative arthritis of all types, connective tissues disease and metabolic bone disorders. The Service is provided on an ambulatory basis with treatment primarily outpatient based.

Most interdepartmental referrals are from other medical specialties such as aged care, gastroenterology and neurology and from general surgery, with some consultations from ICU. There are few consultations from orthopaedic surgery.

Liverpool has a sole staff specialist, 2 VMOs and a multidisciplinary team (physiotherapist, occupational therapist and a temporary funded CNS). The physiotherapist and occupational therapist run arthritis management education programs for patients. The team collaborates with the immunology team to care for patients with connective tissue disease. The Unit provides a teaching program for all 4<sup>th</sup> year medical students, FRACP candidates, JMOs and 6<sup>th</sup> year medical students.

The Bankstown service provides an on-call service by the VMOs with an inpatient consultative service. The service provides teaching for general Practitioners, medical students and FRACP candidates.

There is no hospital-based Rheumatology service at Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield or Bowral.

Paediatric Rheumatology services are currently provided by The Children's Hospital Westmead and Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Rheumatology services be developed as an Area-wide service.
- An Academic Chair in Rheumatology be appointed.
- Liverpool Hospital continue to develop a tertiary level service for the Area with access for patients with complex inflammatory and autoimmune disease to dedicated Rheumatology beds and multidisciplinary clinics.
- General Rheumatology and metabolic bone disease clinics and outreach services be provided progressively at Bankstown, Fairfield, Campbelltown and Bowral, as the service develops.
- A dedicated drug budget be established to support Rheumatology.