



GIPPSLAND
WOMEN'S
HEALTH
SERVICE INC.

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NEWSLETTER

Use it or Lose it?

CONTENTS	PAGE
Editorial	1
Feature Artist	2
10 Point Plan, Free Community Webcast, Facebook	3
Use it or Lose it - The importance of being physically active	4
Seasonal Affective Disorder - More than the Winter Blues	5
Using or Losing Life Skills	6
Pelvic Floor - Use it or Lose it	7
Highlights from the 6th Australian Women's Health Conference	8
Nurses Snippets	9
Healthed Annual Women's Health Update	10
The Magic of Laughter	13
Resources available from GWHS Library	14
Application for Membership	15



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Editorial

Welcome to the Winter 2010 edition of the Gippsland Women's Health Service newsletter. We often hear the term "use it or lose it" in a variety of ways, from references to memory and mental faculty through to our physical ability. Whilst ageing will undoubtedly take its toll on all of us, we can do things to minimise these effects and enable us to continue to participate in life as much as possible.

We look at the importance of being physically active on page 4, with a number of simple tips on how to include some activity into everyday life. I particularly enjoyed the article on page 10 which reflects on the joys and benefits of laughter. And, just think of the exercise for your facial muscles when you smile, much better than those frown-lines.

Maintaining relationships is also extremely important, and maintaining good communication is vital in ensuring that we can do this. How often do we hear about misunderstandings that are caused through poor communication, and these misunderstandings can quite easily escalate in ways that threaten ongoing friendships and relationships. The article on page 6 provides us with some great tips on keeping up good communication, including the non-verbal areas of communication, listening and body language.

As women, we are acutely aware of our bodies getting older when we don't work quite the way we should. Some very important information on one of these areas is included in the Continence article on page 7, which emphasises the importance of maintaining strong pelvic floor muscles. Nurse's Snippets also contains a wealth of information on a number of issues relevant to women of all ages as Alma provides us with an update from the Healthed Annual Women's Health day.

One of the highlights of the past month has been our attendance at the 6th Annual Women's Health Conference in Hobart. The conference provided opportunities for staff and members of the GWHS governing Council to attend presentations on a huge range of issues that impact on the health and wellbeing of women. These included presentations on violence against women, health services for women in rural areas, sexual and reproductive health, gender and diversity issues, mental health,



Princess for a Day by Mandy Rowe.

caring responsibilities, disability and Indigenous women's health - just to name a few. It was great to be able to network and to hear about the work that is being done across the country and across the world. Staff and Council reflections on the conference can be found on pages 8 and 9.

I hope you enjoy the articles included in this newsletter and encourage you to contact GWHS if you would like any additional information in regard to any of these topics.

Diane Wilkinson
Chief Executive Officer

Congratulations...

Congratulations to Daphne Yarram on her appointment to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Daphne is currently the CEO at Yoowinna Wurnalong Healing Service, an Indigenous family violence healing service in East Gippsland. Previously, Daphne has worked for many years within the Victorian Indigenous community in a range of positions to ensure that Aboriginal communities are supported and encouraged to develop local solutions to respond to issues that impact on their lives.

The Magic of Laughter!

Laughter is no Joke! In fact, laughter is a great danger to disease!

When was the last time you had a really good belly laugh? Can't remember - oh dear...

Society today dictates that we must act like 'sensible, mature adults' - but where's the fun in that? No wonder we're so stressed! From the time we were little children, people have been telling us to 'stop being silly', 'wipe that smile off your face', 'grow up' and 'what are you so happy about'. As a result, we have become 'shut down' and afraid of making any noise.

But our body's need us to laugh. When we laugh, we release Endorphins, or as I like to call them - 'Happy hormones'. They're nature's narcotics, and we don't even need a prescription!

The most wonderful thing, is that we don't have to be falling down on the floor in hysterical laughter, holding our bellies with tears in our eyes, about to wet our pants to access them! Although that kind of laughter is of course very enjoyable, it is not essential in order to get a hit of endorphins. Just smiling, in fact even just faking a smile, will do the same thing. That's because our brain can't tell the difference! It's true! If we are feeling frustrated and angry, and then we fake a smile for a few minutes, our brain will release these lovely happy hormones, and then whoosh, the adrenalin and cortico - steroids (from the frustration and anger) are washed away, and we are left feeling relaxed and happy, now that's magic!

We all know how wonderful laughter feels. Haven't we all had the experience of getting the giggles, and then it gets stronger and stronger and we just can't stop laughing. The more we try to stop laughing the funnier the situation becomes and the harder it is to stop! We literally 'get high' on laughter. We are consuming so much fresh oxygen into our lungs, that we usually feel 'light headed' after a good hearty laugh. In fact, sometimes it's difficult to even stand up after a really good belly laugh. We have become so relaxed, our legs feel like jelly! That's because laughter relaxes our nerves and muscles - that includes pelvic floor muscles, so watch out!

There are so many immense benefits to laughter, emotionally, physiologically, mentally and even spiritually. Here are a few that I consider to be the most important. Laughter :

- Relieves stress and anxiety
- Increases T and NIK cells, which fight off and destroy damaged and cancerous cells
- Improves alertness and focus
- Helps us sleep better
- Reduces depression by increasing our levels of Serotonin
- Stimulates Growth hormones
- Increases Creativity

- Balances blood pressure (up or down!)
- Improves thyroid function
- Strengthens the respiratory system
- Induces relaxation
- Strengthens the Immune system
- Improves our feeling of joy and well-being, and heaps of other amazing physical, mental, and spiritual benefits!

Laughter breaks down the walls between us and others. It reconnects us like a 'social glue'.

Did you know that it is impossible to be angry and laugh at the same time - give it a try! Anger releases adrenalin and cortico steroids, whilst laughter releases endorphins. They simply do opposite jobs!

Years ago, it was often thought that people who were perhaps 'not so bright' laughed more. In fact, the opposite is true! It has been proven scientifically that people with a higher IQ laugh more! So there it is, proof that the 'work place clown' is probably smarter than the person who is bent over their computer 'being very serious!' - I know which one I'd rather be!

I have been running 'laughter workshops' for over 8 years now, and have seen some amazing transformations in people even in a short 1 1/2 hour workshop. When we are suddenly allowed to 'have fun' and laugh out loud, dress up and 'play', our minds make a shift. We remember how natural it is for us to have fun and enjoy ourselves. Of course we all have fun with our families, work mates and friends, but I'm talking about really getting active about it. At 'Laughter Works Australia', our workshops include activities like big stomping tantrums, jumping for joy, games, dressing up in all kinds of crazy outfits (tutus, feather boas, jester hats, colourful wigs etc), juggling, laughter 'exercises', and heaps of other hilarious interactive activities! We usually all end up on the floor laughing hysterically about absolutely nothing! I love my job!

So, find your nearest 'laughter club' - there are over 6,000 in the world now! Just google 'laughter clubs' in your State, and go along and laugh and play to your hearts content with a group of like minded and very playful people! Or go to my website www.laughterworksaustralia.com You might find that a giggle too!

Perhaps you would even like me to come and train someone in your workplace to run a little laughter club of your own!

The most important thing to remember, is not to take ourselves and life too seriously. Things are important, but often not as serious as we think they are!

And in the words of Patch Adams....

"The most revolutionary act one can do, is to smile in public!"

Bronwyn Williams

www.laughterworksaustralia.com

GWHS thanks Bronwyn for her contribution.