



Hazelwood Health Study

Clinical Reference Group

Meeting 5/2016

Tuesday 15 November 2016

Minutes

Attendees

Assoc Prof Joseph Tam, Dr Ian Webb, Prof Michael Abramson, Ms Angela Scully, Prof Dennis Moore, Dr Jo McCubbin, Dr Ryan Hoy, Dr Paul Lee, Dr Jill Blackman, Prof Darryl Maybery, Ms Susan Denny (Observer), Ms Larissa Attard (Meeting Notes)

Apologies

Prof Judi Walker, Prof Andrew Tonkin, Prof Sandy MacFarlane, Dr David Monash

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed all in attendance and highlighted the key issue to be discussed at the meeting. The first tranche of results from the Schools Study has indicated a number of children with high CRIES scores. The Department are seeking advice on clinical pathways for these children.

2. Previous Minutes

The Minutes from the meeting held 13 September 2016 were confirmed as a true and accurate account of the meeting.

3. Recommendation for the group of children with high scores on the Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale (CRIES)

The Clinical Reference Group had a lengthy discussion regarding the children with high CRIES scores and the pathway forward. It was agreed that it is important to respond to the Department's request for a clinical pathway and ensure the at-risk children are further monitored without causing their parents undue alarm.

The Group agreed that the CRIES is not a diagnostic instrument and further assessment may be warranted. The Study has not been funded to treat participants and as such, people will need to be referred to appropriate services.

The CRIES measured how children felt about the mine fire at the time they completed the survey, one year after the event. Researchers acknowledge that the results are the children's subjective responses and could be influenced by pre-existing mental health issues. Trauma can build on a number of events, the measure may reflect not just the event itself but a series of events over time.

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The group also reviewed the strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) analysis provided as a late paper. Only a small number of the high scoring children completed the SDQ. Teachers and Parents did not score the children significantly higher on the SDQ emotional subscale, however compared to Australian norms, this sample was scoring higher across parents, teachers and students.

There was some discussion as to the potential to triangulate the results against any other indicators, for example NAPLAN results. The School Study researchers have not yet reviewed NAPLAN results and have submitted an ethics application for access to de-identified NAPLAN data for the non-participants. It would be of concern if there was a significant difference and NAPLAN results showed academic performance of the high scorers was deteriorating.

There was some discussion as to the difficulties with the research in terms of a lack of baseline data and knowledge of what the children were like before the fire. Schools do have some baseline data from SDQ filled out by parents as part of a bigger questionnaire when their children commence school. Researchers are attempting to obtain data from the Education Department.

It was agreed that it was premature to approach the parents of the high scoring children and suggest their children may have psychological problems.

It was suggested that a follow up survey be done around the anniversary of the Fire (Feb/March) with the high scorers and a control group. *Jill commented that it would be difficult to get ethics applications approved by February and there may be issues around funding for the follow up.*

It was suggested that a fact sheet and media release be prepared along the same lines as the Ambulance Attendance data, advising the community & Schools Study participants of the initial findings and stating that if parents have any concerns about their children that they seek advice from their General Practitioner.

The group discussed the lack of child psychologists in the Latrobe Valley. Darryl has spoken with local Department staff and advised that the Latrobe Valley Health Assembly needs to come up with funding for additional support to manage anxiety and trauma. This could be done in schools on a bigger scale, such as a mindfulness program focused on trauma and anxiety.

The group acknowledged that a process needs to be in place for new children at-risk who are identified every two years during the follow up. The generic fact sheet provided to participants, schools and the media will be an important tool in informing participants to seek further assistance if they are concerned about their children's mental health. School Counsellors and GPs also have an important role to play.

Recommendations:

- Darryl Maybery to draft a Fact Sheet regarding the initial results from the School Study and circulate to the Clinical Reference Group for comment prior to distribution.
- The Fact Sheet is to be sent to all participants, placed on the website and released to the Media.
- The 2017 data collection is to go ahead in May / June as originally planned.
- Consideration be given to undertaking an additional study of the high scorers and a control group in Feb / March 2017 to coincide with the anniversary of the mine fire. The follow up study would include several key diagnostic measures. The logistics (e.g. ethics and funding) be considered by the Hazelwood Schools study team and the Project Steering Committee.

- Discuss additional treatment, early intervention and extra screening with the Latrobe Valley Health Assembly / health improvement zone.
- A recommendation will be made to the Department for increased funding for child psychologists in the Latrobe Valley.
- Notify local GPs of the initial findings and that parents with concerns about their children have been advised to consult with their family doctor.

4. Adult Survey: progress and issues arising to date

Jill Blackman reported progress with the Adult Survey in Morwell and Sale. Telephone interviews and online surveys will conclude on November 25th. Hard copy questionnaires will continue to be received until January 31st. Susan Denny reported on community engagement activities.

5. Other business

5.1. Annual community briefing

Will be held 29 November 2016 in the Morwell Bowls Club. All CRG members are invited.

5.2. Government response to Deloitte review of the scope and structure of the long term health study of the Hazelwood coal mine fire

Michael advised that the Government has decided to appoint a Ministerial Advisory Committee reporting to the Minister for Health. The internal governance structure of the Study will not change ie. the Community Advisory Committee and the CRG will remain separate committees.