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Ouyen's community benefits from RFDS outreach services

Wednesday, 23 October 2013



Katrina

Koenig with patient

The Royal Flying Doctor Service in partnership with the Australian College of Optometry is bringing optometric services to a small town in Victoria's Mallee region.

Mallee Track Health and Community Services is also a partner in the 12-month pilot program at Ouyen, which was launched on 17 October.

The program is expected to provide an evidence base on which to build plans for development of a mobile service and education program that could be delivered to other remote rural communities.

Mobile Eye Care will deliver free eye care by optometrists from the ACO, who will fly to Mildura and use an RFDS vehicle to travel to Ouyen and surrounding communities.

Ouyen has a population of about 1,000 but no optometrist or optometric service, and 200 residents aged over 65 years have been identified as needing a local service.

Mallee Track Health and Community Services is offering use of its consulting rooms and reception staff for the service, which will operate two days a month.

Optometrists will use existing ACO portable equipment to provide full-scope optometric services including ocular health assessment, refraction and spectacle dispensing, low vision and ocular therapeutics services.

They will examine and treat patients on the first day. The second will consist of a half-day clinic and a half-day community eye health education and promotion event, taking eye care and education to community centres such as kindergartens, schools and aged-care facilities.

These events will provide opportunities to deliver community eye health training and build closer working relationships with other community health-care providers.

On the first two days, the service was fully booked with 15 patients seen by ACO director of clinic operations Neville Turner and staff optometrist Katrina Koenig.

They also visited Ouyen Preschool, educating children about eye health and the importance of reporting problems with their eyesight, particularly when reading.



(L-R) Maureen O'Keefe, Scott Chapman, Lois Callaghan and the Mayor of Mildura Rural City Council Glenn Milne
Photo: Royal Flying Doctor Service

RFDS Victoria chief executive, Scott Chapman, said the RFDS was committed to taking health care to areas with limited access to these services.

'The nearest optometry service for people in and around Ouyen is in Mildura, which can be difficult to access, particularly for elderly people or those with impaired vision,' he said.

ACO chief executive Maureen O'Keefe said the service would enable detection and management of eye disease, leading to a reduction in vision impairment, and would supply affordable spectacles.

‘The service has had a great start and we are delighted to be able to broaden our primary health care services in the Mallee,’ said Mallee Track Health and Community Services’ director of community services, Lois O’Callaghan.

The program aims to provide improved access to eye care and a matched reduction in visual impairment caused by uncorrected refractive error and treatable eye disease. It also aims to offer easy access to spectacle dispensing at concessionary cost where eligible, and to therapeutic intervention for most common and treatable eye disease.

The optometrists will work with GPs and other health providers to develop a referral network with ophthalmologists for medical and surgical treatment.

This entry was written by Helen Carter, posted on Wednesday, 23 October 2013 Bookmark the [permalink](#).



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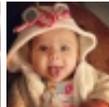
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