

**BURDENSOME
BUREAUCRATIC STYLE**

World-wide, there is a shortage of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, but not of health bureaucrats. Armed with the mantra of evidence-based healthcare, efficiency and performance monitoring, our health bureaucracy is burgeoning.

In the United Kingdom, Whitehall's public servants police the NHS. Through bodies such as the Commission for Health Improvement and the Modernization Agency, they scrutinise performance on service targets and oversee inspection regimes and national standards. And, the system is clogged with policy documents, frameworks, guidelines and memoranda.

In Australia, we are served by eight health departments, but, additionally, there are veritable hives of bureaucrats in Area Health Services, hospitals and primary healthcare. Management is booming! Roger Kilham, of Access Economics, noted that the projected expenditure for health administration from 2003–2004 to 2005–2006 will increase by 17% to an estimated \$5.5 billion in the federal sector alone!

But what is it exactly that these public servants *do*? Throughout their jurisdictions they roll out reams of red tape. As our healthcare think-tanks, they produce a perpetual parade of health strategies, priorities, action plans, guidelines, discussion papers and so on. These tomes are overly long, verbose, increasingly arcane, and roll out long lists of recommendations.

What is the reason for this ponderous bureaucratic style? Could it be that the lack of brevity, clarity and plain speaking is designed to ensure that these tomes are not accessible, and therefore not read?

After all, as Franklin D Roosevelt once observed: "Are you under the impression that I read these memoranda of yours? I can't even lift them."

Martin B Van Der Weyden

LETTERS

Homocysteine and vitamin status in older people in Perth	
Leon A Flicker, Samuel D Vasikaran, Jenny Thomas, John G Acres, Paul E Norman, Konrad Jamrozik, Nicola T Lautenschlager, Peter J Leedman, Osvaldo P Almeida	539
Failed sterilisations and the unwanted child: a new medicolegal minefield?	
Malcolm H Parker	540
Paul Gerber	540
Octreotide treatment for sulfonyleurea-induced hypoglycaemia	
Bronwyn AL Crawford, Channa Perera	540
Peter C Veitch, Rory J Clifton-Bligh	541
Diagnosis and management of hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism	
Malvinder S Parmar	541
Ngaire T Jones	542
Duncan J Topliss, Creswell J Eastman	542
Management of chronic low back pain	
David S Elder	542
John Salmon, Anna Hilyard	543
Nikolai Bogduk	543
Risk-taking behaviour of young women in Australia: screening for health-risk behaviours	
Gordon Broderick	544

BOOK REVIEWS

Constructing RSI: belief and desire	
<i>Reviewed by Richard A Kwiatek</i>	520
Blood and guts: a short history of medicine	
<i>Reviewed by Janet S McCalman</i>	520
Manual of travel medicine and health, 2nd ed	
<i>Reviewed by Robert B Kass</i>	526

SNAPSHOT

A complication of nasogastric feeding and anorexia nervosa	
Desmond Wee, Jon Clarke	507

IN THIS ISSUE . . .	490
----------------------------	-----

IN OTHER JOURNALS . . .	538
--------------------------------	-----

Cover painting: Brolgas in the Sun, by Darren Cooper, an Australian artist of Aboriginal and European heritage. "The Aboriginal culture is something I relate to through my heritage, as both my grandmothers were Aboriginal and I like to use a European style to present the Aboriginal culture to an international community."

Darren's career as an artist began in 1998 when he held an exhibition of his works in his Coffs Harbour studio on the north coast of New South Wales. Over the years Darren has been involved in community, charity and commercial ventures featuring his unique style of art.

For more information visit: www.cooperskooorcreations.com/.