

IN THIS ISSUE

Lonely Planet: General Practice

Welcome aboard the *MJA*'s 2003 General Practice issue. This year we will take you on a journey of



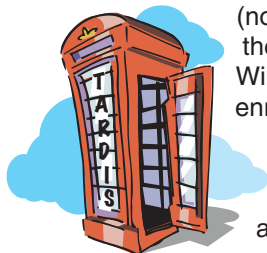
discovery, including some time travel, if you're up for it! For a brief itinerary, consult Van Der Weyden (*page 6*).

Trailblazers

As an academic discipline, General Practice in Australia began its journey fairly recently, with the first nine professors of "Community Practice" appointed between 1974 and 1976. One of these pioneers, Kamien (*page 10*) has surveyed the original cohort to gain their perspective on the first 20-odd years "on the road". Mudge (*page 8*), a current Professor of General Practice, agrees that the discipline has come a long way, and issues a challenge to keep up the momentum.

Dr Who

Don't look now, but according to Del Mar et al (*page 26*), Australian general practice has lost its way. Reluctantly recruited, GPs are undervalued, poorly remunerated, looked down upon and



(not surprisingly) their morale is low. Will intellectual enrichment of the discipline provide a way forward? ask these GP academics.

Take the train(ing)

Like any journey, general practice requires planning and preparation. Vickery and Tarala (*page 19*) are involved in pre-vocational general practice training of junior doctors in rural Western Australia. The road has not been smooth, but the benefits are such that they are keen to see the program expanded.



Australia's General Practice Training Program has just undergone a major upheaval and is now being driven by a federal government-funded company. On *page 16*, Kidd asks how the new training scheme can meet both government and professional goals while maintaining the current high standards.

Another government initiative involves postgraduate mental healthcare training for interested GPs, and new Medicare rebates for those delivering certain psychological treatments. What does this initiative involve and will it work? Blashki et al (*page 23*) give their opinion.

Lost in space?

While it's interesting to examine where general practice has been and where it might be going, we've made sure that, in this issue, we hear from those who are currently on the journey.

Ahearn and Kerr (*page 34*) asked individual GPs about their experiences with the decision-support aspects of their prescribing software. Meanwhile, Oldroyd et al (*page 30*) convened focus groups to discuss how GPs meet the needs of patients with chronic illnesses within the current structure of general practice.



Travelling companions

General practice patients can make excellent clinical research subjects. Pirotta et al (*page 43*) put their female patients' waiting-room time to good use by asking them about their experiences of thrush, especially after taking antibiotics.

GPs have been treating people for heroin addiction for years. However, buprenorphine is relatively new and has usually been used in dedicated drug-treatment clinics. Gibson et al (*page 38*) have conducted a randomised trial, comparing outcomes of patients treated in these clinics with those of patients receiving the drug in general practice.

Starship *MJA* and the next (GP) generation

Boldly going where no issue has gone before, *Starship MJA* embarks on a voyage through general practice scenarios set in the year 2020. On a mission to mould our destiny, we lift off with Dr Zen, FRACGP and minion of the soulless Corporation Enterprise (*page 47*). Dr Zen metamorphoses as we travel through uncharted territories that explore and offer brighter futures, with alternative workforce (*page 48*), training (*page 50*), practice management (*page 51*), consultation (*page 53*), societal (*page 54*) and research (*page 55*) scenarios.



Crossing over

No medical travel guide would be complete without some discussion of life's final journey and every doctor's desire for her patients to have a smooth passage. A recent article by Somerville has reignited the euthanasia debate in the pages of the *Journal* (*page 57*).