

## GP LINK Lunches | Dr Kerry Chant

**Dr Kenneth McCroary, Chair of Sydney South West GP Link, hosts a series of meetings with clinical/political/regional individuals or organisations to discuss issues and solutions for GPs working in South Western Sydney.**

**Ken McCroary** – hello to GP Link members and GP colleagues in South Western Sydney PHN. I hope you have been keeping as safe and as well as possible with our ongoing uncertainty and daily challenges of working in the front line during our global battle with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you are aware South Western Sydney continues to have intermittent small pockets of positive COVID-19 outbreaks with the associated increased challenges for the local GP community.

With this in mind I have been joined today by Dr Kerry Chant the Chief Health Officer within NSW Health.

Good afternoon Kerry are you able to tell us a bit about you and the organisation you are representing today please.

**Kerry Chant** - Yes my name is Kerry Chant and I have the privilege of being the NSW Health Officer my responsibility is to lead the public health aspects of the COVID response acknowledging there are many people involved in that response in NSW Health in the districts in General Practice and across government and business sector.

I have a background of having worked in South Western Sydney many years ago as a Director of a public health unit there for a number of years and certainly have a strong interest of communicable disease control.

**Ken McCroary** – Excellent thank you so much and yes, such a busy time for you no doubt, we really appreciate you giving us some time this evening. The next question is a dual question for both you and your organisation we are keen to know what your mission is and what the mission of your organisation is and how you and your organisation operate in South Western Sydney.

**Kerry Chant** – What we are aiming for at the moment is to achieve no community transmission of COVID-19 and to prepare for a vaccine roll out when a safe effective vaccine is developed. Our ultimate objective is to keep the residents of NSW healthy safe and healthy and that requires us to balance both the COVID response to other illnesses.



**Ken McCroary** – Thank you. Being a local organisation we are wondering if you are aware of any particular issues and challenges that are facing GPs working in South Western Sydney.

**Kerry Chant** – I know that general practice is quite busy everywhere but particularly in South Western Sydney. We know that general practices are very culturally and linguistically diverse population some of which have very significant health needs. I recognise also that at the moment that South Western Sydney has been an area where we have encountered a number of locally acquired cases of COVID where the source has not been identified which tells us there are chains of transmission occurring in South Western Sydney that we are not detecting. If we are to achieve no community transmission, we need to identify all COVID cases promptly and block those chains of transmission.

**Ken McCroary** – Excellent thank you. Now our final question about our local General Practitioners and that is, what do you think you and your organisation are able to do to help and support General Practice and General Practitioners in South Western Sydney?

**Kerry Chant** – The South Western Sydney Public Health Unit is a resource that can support General Practice in understanding who they should be testing. At the moment the message is strongly to test anyone who could have COVID with even the most minimal symptoms. We need those high rates of testing. The public health unit will also undertake any contact tracing that occurs around any positive cases they can also assist in understanding and when you may need to use other diagnostic tests or when repeat testing should be considered.

**Ken McCroary** – Excellent thank you. Kerry with the pandemic and our excellent responses so far, I was just wondering if you have some particular specific advice for local GPs going forward with COVID.

**Kerry Chant** - My Key message, particularly for GPs in South Western Sydney, are my messages more broadly, and that at this time is, it's important we find every single case and block those chains of transmission. So even while case numbers are quite low, I am just requesting all GPs test at this critical time, all patients presenting with any COVID-like symptoms. We have seen a drop off in testing as case numbers have declined, but actually it is a time to double our efforts in driving towards no community transmission of COVID. I would also ask GPs to be particularly attentive in those areas where we call out for increased testing associated with positive sewage surveillance or where there might be clusters or outbreaks occurring.

**Ken McCroary** – Great, do you mind if I ask you just to refresh everyone again with the various possibilities of symptomatology that may be related to COVID and how important it is that we are looking for all of the cross sectional symptoms not just the more significant ones.

**Kerry Chant** – COVID is a pretty tricky disease because it basically can mimic the common cold all the way through to a more severe flu or pneumonia and you can be equally as infectious. In our experience, if you have even mild symptoms you can transmit the scratchy, itchy throat the runny nose, the cough, the fever, the headaches, the loss of taste or smell, any of those symptoms or general fatigue, combined with any of those symptoms, really the patient needs a COVID test each time.

**Ken McCroary** – And would you say the same for undiagnosed nausea, diarrhoea that sort of thing as well?

**Kerry Chant** – Look I think they are less common, we don't often see those symptoms alone so I would go to more of those other symptoms, the respiratory symptoms, where they are indicating the fever, the runny nose, the sore throat, but you do not need to be severely unwell. You don't need to have a high fever. So I think what I am urging people to do is to really have a very low threshold for any of those COVID symptoms for testing and we particularly would not want to miss any cases in workers in aged care health care or any vulnerable and sensitive workplaces.

**Ken McCroary** - Fantastic, so it is important that essentially everyone with any respiratory symptoms whatsoever gets tested and that means ignoring the patient with their own reassurances that it is just their hay fever or whatever playing up at the moment, isn't it?

**Kerry Chant** – It's to have the suspicion that it is COVID until it is proven otherwise. Obviously I respect the judgement of GPs if the patient has checked continuously but we have had some interesting near misses and I would be happy to share with GPs of South Western Sydney and across the state where patients have presented with potentially asthma-like symptoms, they have a past history that obviously is the exacerbation, it may have been triggered by an underlying viral or in this case Coronavirus, so it is important not to disregard that Coronavirus may be linked to the symptoms when you have an exacerbation or even an underlying chronic condition.

**Ken McCroary** – That's fantastic I really like that it is COVID until we can prove clinically with pathology backing us up that it is 100% not isn't it.

**Kerry Chant** - That's correct.

**Ken McCroary** – Excellent. Thanks Kerry that has been so enlightening and I really appreciate your time once again thank you so much for talking to us today.

**Kerry Chant** – Thank you take care.