



**Minutes of Meeting of Establishment Committee for  
Australian Mortality Data Interest Group (AMDIG)  
Held by teleconference 8 May 2003, 10-11am EST**

**Present:** Ron Casey, National Causes of Death Unit, Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Paul Jelfs and Krys Sadkowsky, Population Health Unit, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Trevor Stacey, NSW Registrar-General of Births, Deaths & Marriages; Chair, BDMOZ  
Chalapathi Rao, School of Population Health, University of Queensland  
Charles Naylor, Queensland Health Chief Forensic Pathologist  
James Harrison and Renate Kreisfeld, AIHW National Injury Surveillance Unit  
Garry Waller & Sue Walker, National Centre for Classification in Health, QUT

**Apology:** Alan Lopez, School of Population Health, University of Queensland

## **Preamble**

Garry Waller, as Chair of the meeting, welcomed participants to this first gathering of the Establishment Committee for the proposed Australian Mortality Data Interest Group (AMDIG). He briefly outlined the reasons for the formation of the AMDIG, which arose from discussions at the *Understanding Mortality Data* workshop, held at the QUT School of Public Health's International Summer School in late 2002. Following the workshop, and subsequent to discussions with other interested parties, the NCCH believes that there is a need to formally bring together individuals and groups with an interest in the collection, processing and use of mortality data, with the ultimate aim of sharing experiences and knowledge to facilitate understanding and improvements in these areas.

Garry invited participants to introduce themselves and explain their interest in the collection or use of mortality data.

**Garry:** Senior Classification Officer at NCCH in Brisbane. Formerly worked with ABS in the Causes of Death Unit, has a keen interest in improving the quality of mortality data. Convenor of the *Understanding Mortality Data* workshop.

**Sue:** Associate Director, NCCH. Australia's representative to WHO Mortality Reference Group, sees AMDIG as a resource to get Australian views on proposed international changes to the ICD-10, as well as to exchange information with the view of improving the collection and coding of mortality data.

**Ron:** Director, Causes of Death National Processing Centre at Australian Bureau of Statistics. Main interests are improving cause of death data and improving the ABS' ability to provide useful mortality information to clients.



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Paul: Director, Population Health Unit at AIHW. Interest focuses on analysis of mortality data and its use for informing policy development and public health interventions. Unit also conducts and assists with epidemiological studies using the National Death Index.

Trevor: Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages and current Chair of BDMOZ. Major interests are in improving quality, integrity and timeliness of data; forging improved partnerships with relevant organisations such as the ABS and AIHW

Chalapati: Lecturer, School of Population Health, University of Queensland. Recently arrived from WHO in Geneva, where worked on Global Burden of Disease 2000 project with Alan Lopez. Interested in the study of mortality data from both demographic and epidemiological aspects, at international, national and subnational levels. Hoping to develop steps to work towards improved quality of mortality data internationally.

Charles: Chief Forensic Pathologist for Queensland Health, working on coronial reform for past 11 years. Recent developments in Queensland – new Coroners Act, announcement of appointment of state coroner, new BDM Bill. Interest in quality of data at production end, looking for agreement re procedures for electronic registration of deaths.

James: Director, AIHW National Injury Surveillance Unit, part of National Centre for Injury Studies. User of national mortality data, also national and international participation in committees relating to classification development (ICD-10, ICD-10-AM, ICECI) and uses of coded data. Also user of coronial information, participated in development of National Coroners' Information System. Particular recent interest in indigenous deaths and the link with coronial processes.

## 1. Australian Mortality Data Interest Group – draft Terms of Reference

Garry drew the attention of participants to the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Group and invited comments from participants. There was general agreement with the TOR as defined. The following additional points were noted:

- Need for strengthening of relationships and collaboration between relevant individuals and groups
- Clarification of stakeholders – eg funeral directors, other universities, MUNCCI not currently represented – it was emphasised that the current participants only represent the Establishment Committee to get the AMDIG up and running. In future, membership of the group will be open to anyone with an interest in, or working, in the area.

Paul advised that his unit acts as Secretariat for the National Public Health Information Working Group. He will inform this Group of the establishment of the AMDIG with the aim of establishing either cross membership or communication links.

- The importance of the connection to international work was supported and is to be added to the TOR.
- The major areas of interest are in the areas of collection, collation, coding, dissemination, utilization of mortality data – these could form basis for future longitudinal studies.

**Action:** *The NCCCH will update the Terms of Reference and will re-circulate to the Group for comments.*

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*Paul will discuss AMDIG with National Public Health Information Working Group and consider collaborative links between groups.*

## 2. AMDIG Committee

Suggestions for additional members were:

- Monash University Centre for Coronal Information (MUNCCI)
- Other university groups known to be interested eg at ANU, Monash – Paul and James have contacts
- Trans-Tasman involvement eg New Zealand researchers (John Langley), NZ Registrar (Brian Clarke), someone responsible for the cause of death collection
- Representatives from the World Health Organization Western Pacific and South East Asia offices
- Client groups, such as the State Health Authorities, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, who are responsible for creating policies that are underpinned by mortality data
- Joan Cunningham, chair of indigenous information and statistics group at Menzies School of Health Research
- Someone from new Centre for Aboriginal Health
- Chair of BD MOZ – currently Trevor is the Chair but there is an annual appointment to this position from amongst the Australian Registrars
- Representation from the Australian Funeral Directors' Association and other funeral directors' groups. Trevor has some relevant contacts.

**Action:** *Members with specific suggestions to forward contact details to Garry at [g.waller@qut.edu.au](mailto:g.waller@qut.edu.au).*

The group discussed whether membership should be limited, whether the AMDIG should have individual members or organisational representation, and whether there should be a 'sunset clause' on membership. It was agreed that, in the first instance, the net will be cast widely and membership accepted from anyone who expresses interest. In the future, the group may subdivide its work into subcommittees, based on broad areas of interest. There will be a formal renewal of membership process every couple of years. Sue noted that, whilst the NCCH is happy to provide the Chair and Secretariat in the first instance, there may be a need to consider an independent Chair and resources to support the work of the Group in the future.

James queried whether, because of NCCH's involvement in the development and maintenance of the ICD-10-AM (the classification used in coding hospital morbidity data), there would be some form of communication between the AMDIG work on mortality coding using ICD-10 and the 10-AM work. The Group agreed that this would be a useful outcome.

**Action:** *Garry to add to the Terms of Reference.*

## 3. Annual meeting

It was agreed that an annual face to face meeting was desirable and that the QUT Summer School provided an appropriate vehicle to facilitate this meeting. The 2002 Summer School provided a useful platform on which to build the work program. Between meetings, communication will be via an e-mail List\_Serv, to which anyone with an interest can



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subscribe. It was agreed that this would be preferable to the development of a Bulletin Board although the ABS would be willing to investigate this option if required.

**Action:** *Garry will investigate this option further with the view to QUT hosting the List\_Serv.*

## 4. Summer School Program

Garry noted that, based on feedback from the 2002 one-day workshop, this year's Summer School will be three days, with a shared half day with the workshop on indigenous health issues. Ron and Trevor asked about the potential participants in the Summer School, because the audience will affect the focus for presentations. Sue indicated that last year the audience was a mixed bag, with some participants interested in a high-level overview, others who had experience in the field wanting more specific technical information, and a final group of students who just thought the topic looked interesting.

Chalapati felt that an overall theme for the program could be 'Collection and Collation of Mortality Data'. This would be sufficiently broad to enable separate foci for the individual sessions e.g. online notification of deaths, indigenous death certification issues, analytical and epidemiological uses of mortality data, and policy development. This was thought to be a useful model, particularly if registrants can only attend for one or two days.

James and Paul felt that being able to link common themes from the meeting through to actions and an annual work program for the AMDIG would be useful, with a report-back session on outcomes the following year. This means that one of the final sessions in the Summer School program in 2003 should be a drawing together of "action items" and issues arising over the previous days.

**Action:** *Garry and Sue will develop the next draft of the Summer School program for circulation to the Group.*

## 5. Communication methods

Distribution of the 'Call for papers' and invitation to the 2003 Summer School were considered. Garry indicated that he currently has a fairly extensive mailing list which includes some international colleagues; however, it would be helpful if participants could either undertake to further distribute information amongst their own contacts, or provide details to NCCH to enable distribution from QUT. The workshop-specific program will be available in both hard copy for mail out and PDF format for emailing.

## 6. Future meetings

Garry suggested a further teleconference prior to the Summer School to consolidate ideas and plans. He further recommended that until the List-Serv is established, that email messages be copied to all members of the Group to facilitate information sharing.

James, Chalapati and Paul all congratulated the NCCH for taking the initiative to establish the AMDIG and looked forward to future collaborative work.

Garry thanked members for their participation and closed the meeting at 11:10am EST.