Celebrating 110 years

Sydney Dental Hospital

Serving community since 1904

Working together to achieve excellence in service, education, teaching and research

NSW Government Health Sydney Local Health District
Serving our community since 1904

This year marks the 110th anniversary of Sydney Dental Hospital, the only dental hospital of its kind in NSW. It is a centre of excellence that throughout its history has been a key driver in shaping oral health and dental care in Australia.

This anniversary provides us with an opportunity to recognise the contribution our Oral Health staff make every day in the delivery of excellent clinical services across Sydney Local Health District. At the heart of this leading service are nearly 400 dedicated staff (Dental Specialists, Dental Officers, Dental Assistants, Oral Health Therapists, Dental Therapists, Dental Hygienists, Dental Prosthetists, Dental Technicians, Nurses, Dietitians, Sterilising Technicians, Administration, Human Resources, Finance, Security, General Management, Domestic Services, Information Technology and Engineering Services) and we would like to recognise their contribution.

Since the act of parliament that formed the United Dental Hospital, Sydney Dental Hospital has built its reputation as a centre of excellence through collaboration and partnerships. Sydney Dental Hospital has always played a key role in the development of essential specialist services such as railway dental carriages in the 1970’s partnership with State Rail to today’s innovative Hub and Spoke partnership program focused on improving oral health for Aboriginal people in our community.

As a centre of learning, Sydney Dental Hospital maintains strong research and training links with a broad range of institutions such as the University of Sydney and the University of Newcastle as well as TAFE NSW. The hospital plays a significant role in the development of the next generation of dental health professionals through specialist mentor and graduate programs as well as Dental Assistant Trainships for Aboriginal staff.

In addition to its outstanding reputation as a leader in Oral Health, Sydney Dental Hospital’s iconic flatiron building and central Sydney location have made it a favourite Sydney landmark. We’d like to thank Sydney artist Simon Fieldhouse for helping us celebrate this important milestone by using his work Sydney Dental Hospital as part of our celebrations.

Oral health is an integral part of good general health. At Sydney Dental Hospital we look forward to continuing to serve our community for many years to come.

Dr Warwick Harty
110th Anniversary
Committee Member

A/Professor Sameer Bhole
Clinical Director

Lavena Ramdutt
General Manager
1901 The Dental Act of NSW was introduced which meant anyone wanting to practice as a dentist had to be registered.

1904 The Dental Hospital Union Act allowed amalgamation of University Dental Hospital and The Dental Hospital of Sydney. Land was set aside at current site in Chalmers Street.

1912 The four storey building modelled on the Pennsylvania Dental College was completed. Despite being the first specially designed dental hospital to be erected in Australia, the Hospital was never officially opened, because of the adverse criticism the Hospital Board administration had endured for the new project.

1912-1920 Introduction of procaine as a local anaesthetic. Prior to this pain relief was provided with cocaine, ether or nitrous oxide inhalation.

“The building is one of the best of its kind to be seen anywhere: there is nothing in the Southern Hemisphere in the shape of a Dental Hospital to equal it.”

E. Randolph Magnus, President of the United Dental Hospital

“It appears to me that one purpose to be served by the amalgamation will be to let loose a lot of young University cubs who want to practice on the jaws of the community under sanction of an Act of Parliament.”

John Norton, Member for Surry Hills, on the Dental Hospitals Union Bill 1904
1920-1930 In the first half of the century, dental caries were in such pandemic proportions that many of the population had all their teeth extracted and replaced with dentures (called a total clearance). In the 1920s prophylactic odontotomy was recommended and widely used as a method of preventing dental decay in children.

1919 The Dental Hospital was severely damaged by a fire that began in the adjoining building.

1923 The United Dental Hospital staff consisted of 10 people - three dentists, three nurses and four dental technicians, with 50 students in training.

“Any reasoning dentist would rather see a tooth with a little cement sticking in its fissures and pits instead of chocolate and bread and all sorts of things. Prophylactic odontotomy is good for the six-year-old molar.”

Henry J. Moore
By the late 1930s, the original building was inadequate to meet demands of the growing numbers of patients, staff and students. Staff now numbered 130, students 175.

1935 Travelling Dental Rail Clinics, providing free dental treatment for pensioners, begins operation. The railway carriages contained a surgery equipped with two dental chairs, a waiting room, prosthetic lab, office, shower, kitchenette and diesel power plant.

1938 The NSW Government provided the hospital with funds to purchase the apex of the triangle of land bounded by Elizabeth and Chalmers Streets. Construction of a new six-storey hospital, in the distinctive ‘flat-iron’ design, commenced.

1930-1940 Development of the dental unit as a single piece of equipment with cuspidor, drills and air blower all in one. Introduction of synthetic resin to replace vulcanite in the construction of dentures.
1945 Married women on staff, employed only as a wartime measure, were made redundant. Until the 1970s, female staff who were single on appointment and then married had to request permission to continue their employment.

15 April 1940 The new building officially opened by the Governor of NSW, Lord Wakehurst, before an assembly of 900 people.

1947-1952 Two new floors were added to the new hospital. Land was acquired on the south side of the 1912 hospital and construction began on a 9-storey building. The original hospital building was demolished in 1954 with the two new buildings linked into one.

1950-1960 Introduction of the air turbine drill and lignocaine as a local anaesthetic, both of which revolutionised dentistry and enabled pain-free dental treatment.

1957 The main United Dental Hospital building, as it appears today, was officially opened on 12 June following further development.

1940-1950 The new Dental Hospital’s operating room on the 5th floor provided 46 dental chairs and units. For the first time dental students used electric motorised drills, prior to this pedal drills were used.
“I must congratulate you on having such a magnificent building – quite the best in the British Empire – and I have not seen better in the USA.”

Frank Wilkinson, Dean of Eastman Dental Hospital, London, to Dean Airey, United Dental Hospital.

1958 The salary for males was between 21 pounds, three shillings and one penny and 29 pounds. 16 shillings and seven pence per week. Women earned 15% less than males for the same work.

1950-1960s Discovery of the acid-etch technique that enabled white fillings to be adhered to teeth. This technique led to the development of fissure sealing, white posterior filling materials and modern aesthetic dentistry.

1960-1970s After acceptance of the benefits of fluoridation in 1954, many of Australia’s drinking water supplies began fluoridation. By 1984 almost 66% of the Australian population had access to fluoridated drinking water.

Professor Norton Duckmant

Professor Norton Duckmant reluctantly retired from his post at Sydney Dental Hospital in 2014, at the age of 88, after a career in dentistry that has spanned 66 years.

He has been fortunate to witness revolutionary changes in the field of dentistry, including the introduction of water fluoridation and the modernisation of implants.

Professor Duckmant looks forward to the future achievements of Sydney Dental Hospital in its second century, having “a golden opportunity to adopt a pivotal role in the future of the dental profession,” he said.

1960-1970 Introduction of single use cartridges for the administration of local anaesthetic, which was not widely practiced in medicine until the 1990s.
“I am hoping that its assessment will lead to a more integrated program of service with dental units attached to peripheral and country hospitals.”

Minister for Health Hon. Ken Stewart MP, concerning the committee he had appointed to consider the future role of the Hospital, 1980.

1971 A Road Unit, a large van with dental facilities administered by the United Dental Hospital, commenced work on the South Coast of NSW, with Shoalhaven Hospital as its base.

1978 The Dental Hospital’s Union Act of 1904 was repealed by Parliament and replaced by the Public Hospitals (United Dental Hospital of Sydney) Amendment Act 160, 1978. This provided for the incorporation of the Board. A new Board of nine members, three of whom were nominated by the University of Sydney, was appointed by the Minister for Health and took office in April 1979.

1973 The old Metro Goldwyn Mayer building (MGM), acquired for $400,000 by the Hospitals Commission of NSW, is renovated and added to Sydney Dental Hospital.

1970-1980 School dental therapists introduced in NSW. Dentists assumed the title of Doctor. The highly invasive technique of prophylactic odontotomy, introduced in the 1920s, is replaced by the advent of fissure sealants in the 1970s.  

June Cassidy
Nurse Unit Manager

Sister June Cassidy only expected to stay a year at Sydney Dental Hospital – when she began 43 years ago in January 1971.

For June the best thing about the hospital that has kept her coming back is the people she has worked with. “I’ve been working here for so long it feels like a second home,” she said.

June has also experienced first-hand the significant changes in training of new staff. “We were only taught when we were nursing – keep them out of pain, and you knew a bit about cleaning your own teeth, but that was it,” she said.
1981 Three Mobile Road Units were introduced to visit nursing homes and private residences to provide treatment to the aged and frail.

1980 After a four month trial, nursing sisters on the staff were permitted to discontinue wearing veils and caps. In 1973 female dentists were allowed to wear slacks with white coats in surgery.

1986 The hospital’s two Travelling Dental Rail Clinics, providing free dental treatment for pensioners, were retired.

1987 On 19 March a stop-work meeting was called due to lack of consultation over a Review Report regarding the future of dental services. Workers voted to fight the closure of the hospital, which they said, would deprive thousands of disadvantaged patients of dental care.

1992 The Board of Directors is dissolved and United Dental Hospital is incorporated into the Central Sydney Area Health Service (CSAHS).


Dr Natalie Oprea
Dental Specialist

In a dental career that has spanned 33 years, Dr Natalie Oprea has spent the last 24 of them working at the Sydney Dental Hospital’s Special Care Dentistry Department.

Her favourite part of working at the Hospital is being able to help continually improve patient care in the Special Care Dentistry Department. “Today Special Care caters for a wide range of patients; we are extremely innovative in the services we offer people with disabilities, behavioural problems and medically compromised patients,” she said.

Natalie said as manager, having a trusting and open relationship with staff is the key to a happy and productive workplace. “We have to do the best that we can. I strongly believe in what I say. I know how to empower my staff and I am really passionate about my work,” she said.
2001 Major renovations as part of CSAHS Resource Transition Program were completed and the refurbished hospital was officially opened.

Carolyn Smith
Dental Assistant

From pump up chairs to uniforms with caps, dental assistant Carolyn Smith has seen a lot of changes in nearly three decades at Sydney Dental Hospital.

"I'd say that almost everything really has changed from dentistry to nurses having more responsibilities," she said.

"We were also all reviewed after marriage in those days and assessed to see whether we would be able to work and have married life at the same time.

Carolyn has made a lot of friends through her career at the Hospital, and maintains contact with past staff through an annual reunion.

2002 Following consultation with the Australian Dental Council the United Dental Hospital agreed to facilitate the first ADC clinical examination of overseas trained dentists since 1994. Overall, 30 clinical exams were conducted at SDH between 2002 to 2014, with the final ADC examination held in July.

2004 The United Dental Hospital of Sydney was renamed The Sydney Dental Hospital and a new logo was launched. Sydney Dental Hospital celebrates its centenary.

2005 SDH Aboriginal Dental Assistant program provides 2-3 trainee fulltime positions each year paid as Grade 1 Dental Assistants, as well as providing support for finding a position in the district on completion of the Traineeship.

2003 TAFE becomes "Tenants" of the SDH building.

2005 Central Sydney Area Health Service amalgamates with South Western Sydney Area Health Service to become Sydney South West Area Health Service (SSWAHS).
2009 Specialist Mentor Program in Oral Surgery is established and then expanded progressively to Paediatric Dentistry, Removable Prosthodontics, Relative Analgesia, Periodontics Instrumentation, Endodontics, and Periodontics Practice.

Ingrid List
Dental Technician

Ingrid List is a gifted prosthetic technician who has worked at the Sydney Dental hospital for 23 years. In collaboration with Dr. James Fisher, Ingrid manufactures prosthetic ears, noses and eyes to restore aesthetics and function to patients who have often suffered great illness, trauma and social hardship.

Before the time of implants in the 1980’s, Ingrid fondly remembers an elderly widowed gentleman who was treated for skin cancer, and had his prosthetic ear glued onto his skin.

“At his review appointment, he walked in with his prosthetic ear twisted on sideways. It was crooked but he didn’t mind because he had an ear!” she said.

Ingrid enjoys the flexibility in her working conditions at the hospital having had the opportunity to work in a range of different departments.

2010 Official opening of the Aboriginal Oral Health Clinic on 2 June. Hub and Spoke program is funded by NSW Health under Closing the Gap initiative.

2010 SIM Clinic on the 5th floor opened.


Dr John Chu
Dental Officer

Dr John Chu has been working at the Sydney Dental Hospital in various departments, including the Endodontics clinic and the Prosthetics Department, since the 1990s.

For him the best part of the job is the people he’s worked with. “Everyone has been helpful and supportive, I have made lots of friends here and met lots of interesting people,” Dr Chu said.

“One of my favourite jobs working here was us as a relief dentist!” Dr Chu said.

“I was sent to a different department every day – that’s probably how I met so many people here,” he said.

2011 Originally initiated in 2008, a formal Sydney Dental Hospital New Graduate Program was established in 2011, providing graduates from Australia and New Zealand access to extensive experience in all aspects of dentistry under the mentorship of senior clinicians and specialists.
2012 Launch of the Midwifery Initiated Oral Health Project supporting midwives to provide quick oral health assessment for pregnant women.

2013 Specialist Mentor Programs established in Oral Surgery, Paediatric Dentistry, Removable Prosthodontics, Relative Analgesia, Periodontic Instrumentation, Endodontics, and Periodontic Practice.

2013 Consolidation of sterilising areas. A purpose built modern control sterilising department at Sydney Dental Hospital.

2014 Oral Health Services at Marrickville, Croydon, Concord, RPA and Canterbury align with Sydney Dental Hospital to form Sydney Local Health District Oral Health Services.

2014 Voluntary Dental Corporate Year Programme Infrastructure Development. 10 chair purpose built clinic on level 6 of the hospital through a Commonwealth allocation of funds to support graduate dental officer placements at Sydney Dental Hospital.

A/Professor Sameer Bhole
Clinical Director

In his mission to promote and improve the oral health of patients across the district, Sameer Bhole has seen the value of Sydney Dental Hospital’s strong focus on training.

“This hospital has an important ongoing role in training the future dental workforce in NSW and Australia as a teaching institution,” he said.

“Sydney Dental Hospital is also a key partner in initiatives such as the Hub and Spoke program, a promising program in working to Close the Gap in Aboriginal Health,” Professor Bhole said.

Sydney Dental Hospital would like to acknowledge and thank all its staff, past and present, for their dedication and their contribution to improving the dental health of the people of NSW for over a century.