Tea and a Biscuit

Balmain has a new therapist – in the guise of a loveable Groodle named Biscuit.

Four-year-old Biscuit, a cross between a golden retriever and poodle, is visiting the hospital weekly with owner Irene Cassidy, to cheer up patients thanks to a volunteer organisation called Delta Therapy Dogs.

With more than 900 dogs and volunteers visiting about 550 facilities nationally, the organisation says ‘pet therapy’ reduces tension, boosts activity levels and speeds up recovery, encouraging some patients to leave the confines of their rooms for the first time in months.

“It gives the older people something to get excited about and look forward to every week,” Ms Cassidy said.

“It lightens everyone’s spirits and that can last for the rest of the day.”

Dearne Boaden, a patient at Balmain Hospital, said Biscuit’s visit was a happy reminder of pets that some patients had left behind when they came to hospital.

“Pets give you a reason and inspiration to meet each day because you need to get up and feed them and take them for a walk,” Ms Boaden said.

“It was just lovely to have him here in the hospital and I know that everyone will be looking forward to it.”

Ms Cassidy, a retired mathematics lecturer who started volunteering six months ago, said Biscuit had undergone a rigorous screening process to ensure that he had the right temperament and responded well to hospital environments.

“It is very rewarding because it takes such a small part of your day but makes such a big difference to the patients,” Ms Cassidy said.

“Biscuit loves the attention. I think he enjoys the visits as much as the patients.”
Message from the Chief Executive

March marks the launch of two exciting online services that will have a significant impact on improving health outcomes.

HealthPathways goes from strength to strength, with the Sydney Online Information Portal going live on March 16th. This innovative program will be an invaluable tool for clinicians and general practitioners negotiating our District’s diverse healthcare services, ensuring that their patients get the best care options available.

Heterosexual people living with HIV will have easier access to information through Pozhet’s new dedicated website and Facebook page. This excellent service will now be able to provide even greater support for people and their families confronted with HIV diagnosis.

We also have Close the Gap and Harmony Day celebrations to look forward to, recognising the efforts our staff have made to improve health outcomes in the community. Close the Gap will be held at Royal Prince Alfred on Thursday 20th March and feature aboriginal cultural performances and guest speakers. Harmony Day will follow on Friday at Concord Hospital, promoting the District’s multilingual health resources.

In construction news, I was proud to attend the ‘topping out’ ceremony at the Missenden Mental Health Unit with the NSW Minister for Mental Health, Kevin Humphries. This marks the highest point of construction for the building and I look forward to the unit being operational later this year.

Finally, with flu season approaching I would like to urge everyone to get vaccinated. This disease can have a serious effect on elderly, pregnant and ill people. Free flu shots will be available to all staff at District hospitals over the coming months.

Message from the Chair, District Board

The District’s Capital Works program is progressing well, with the construction of the Charles Perkins Centre completed this month.

This collaborative research hub will enable breakthroughs in obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular treatments that will support our reputation for innovative, quality healthcare. The dedicated palliative care unit at Concord Hospital is also on track for completion in June. This will be an important contribution to the high quality, end of life care we can provide.

The recent Strategic Plan Refresh Workshop proved to be an excellent forum for board members and senior clinical and executive staff to discuss the progress of the District’s Strategic Plan. I’m pleased to say that a large amount of the aims of the District Healthcare Services Plan 2013-2018 have been achieved earlier than expected. Several new opportunities for improvement in the District’s core areas of research, staff and facilities were identified. I look forward to seeing the achievements these will have in the future.

A highlight of this year will be the Sydney Innovation and Research Symposium in May. This exciting event will feature presentations from some of our leading medical researchers, and showcase the ground-breaking work in clinical care that is characteristic of our District.
District Highlights

MARCH/APRIL 2014

Bringing hospital home

Two major initiatives are being launched across Sydney Local Health District that will enhance the way the local community can access clinical care and improve efficiency.

The Hospital in the Home (HiTH) service is designed to provide selected types of acute care in the home or in a clinic setting separate from inpatient hospital care.

Dr Vicky Ting, Manager of the service at Concord Hospital, said patients who did not require hospitalisation were appreciating the comfortable, relaxed environment of the HiTH clinic.

The other major initiative is the launch of the Sydney District Nursing service, which provides the clinical staff who make the HiTH service possible.

In addition to providing care in the HiTH clinic settings, the SDN service can visit patients twice each day to provide home assessment, monitoring, and treatment.

Australian living treasure to address symposium

This year Sydney Local Health District will host its second annual Innovation and Research Symposium, showcasing the latest work and breakthroughs of more than 30 of its leading experts and researchers.

This year internationally renowned immunologist and Australian of the Year (2000), Sir Gustav Nossal, will be attending as a keynote speaker.

Sir Gustav’s work is cited as fundamental to our understanding of the immune system and as having helped build the foundations of modern immunology.

Sir Gustav said he was delighted to participate in the symposium, which will focus on advances in areas such as surgery, innovative care treatments, clinical trials and research.

“The Sydney Local Health District is clearly committed to advancing medical research that will help enhance the lives of its patients and the health of its community,” Sir Gustav said.

The Sydney Innovation and Research Symposium 2014 will be held at the Australian Technology Park, Eveleigh from 8.30am to 5pm on Friday, 16 May.

For more information visit slhd.nsw.gov.au/innovationsymposium.

A welcome from the chief

NSW Chief Nurse Susan Pearce recently visited Royal Prince Alfred Hospital to welcome some of the 247 new nurses and midwives who are starting work within Sydney Local Health District this year.

Ms Pearce said these graduates included 19 midwifery nurses and 23 mental health nurses, and were part of a record investment in the recruitment of nurses and midwives across NSW this year.

“I can tell you from my own experience that nursing is a wonderful career full of opportunities, challenges and the rewards of improving the lives of the patients we care for,” Mrs Pearce said.

The Director of Nursing and Midwifery for SLHD, Katharine Duffy, said the district’s graduates were among more than 1,800 nurses and midwives joining the NSW public health system this year.

“They will provide valuable assistance at their placement hospitals while gaining the finest hands-on training possible,” Ms Duffy said.
The deadly side of kidneys

Researchers led by nephrologists at Concord Hospital, The George Institute for Global Health and the University of Sydney have found more patients die from acute kidney attack than heart attacks.

Research leader and Associate Professor of Medicine at Concord Hospital Clinical School, Martin Gallagher, said the study found only one third of acute kidney attack patients were alive 3.5 years after diagnosis.

“We were surprised by our findings as this is a higher death rate than that seen in recognised high risk conditions such as heart attack,” A/Prof Gallagher said.

“The burden of acute kidney attack is increasing and it is much more common than the chronic kidney disease that requires long term dialysis.”

Up to 50,400 Australians and 11,200 New Zealanders a year are diagnosed with acute kidney attack which, when requiring dialysis, is the most expensive hospital admission.

Acute kidney attack can be caused by x-ray contract fluid, severe infection, surgical procedures and sudden drops in blood pressure.

“It is a common complication during hospitalisation and is associated with high death rates, ill health, and prolonged hospital stays,” A/Prof Gallagher said.

The study, published in the journal PLOS Medicine, also showed that higher doses of continuous dialysis for acute kidney attack patients did not reduce high mortality in the longer term.

“We looked at current treatment methods for these patients, but found that they don’t work,” A/Prof Gallagher said. “What we urgently need now is to find new treatments and approaches.”

The study also found that surviving patients had very high rates of ongoing kidney disease.

Power to the people

More than 400,000 Australians are choosing healthier foods while shopping thanks to a smartphone app developed by The George Institute for Global Health.

The FoodSwitch app allows users to scan packaged food barcodes using the phone’s camera and then suggests healthier alternative products.

Professor Bruce Neal, of The George Institute for Global Health and The University of Sydney, said so many Australians had embraced the app that it would now be launched in the United Kingdom.

“It proves that people really want to find healthier and more nutritious food,” Professor Neal said. “If you put the tools in their hand, they can find food with lower salt, sugar and fat for themselves and their families.”

The app launched with just 17,000 items but through the crowd sourcing function, which allows users to contribute, it now has more than 50,000 individual products and another 25,000 due to be added through monthly updates.

A version of the app is already available in New Zealand and will launch in the UK with more than 100,000 food and drink products in its database.

Professor Neal said the app aimed to put the power back in the hands of the consumer and that it could pressure food retailers into stocking healthier options.

“Photographs of missing products sent in by users give us a complete picture of what products are available,” Professor Neal said. “We can now hold big business directly to account for what they are putting on the shelves.”

The app has received more than 2000 positive feedback emails with many people explaining how it had helped them with their food purchases.
Connecting communities for 20 years

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Sydney Local Health District’s Community Visitors Scheme, through which volunteers brighten the lives of people living in residential aged care facilities.

Sydney Local Health District will hold a special celebration this month to mark the occasion. The NSW Governor, Professor Marie Bashir, will attend to thank all volunteers for their years of service.

Paula Zelynski, who was one the first volunteers to join the scheme when it began, said it was especially important for those elderly residents who may be isolated or lonely, for social or cultural reasons, or due to disability.

“Some don’t even have family or friends to visit,” Ms Zelynski said. “I couldn’t bear to see them like that.”

Born in China with Russian heritage, Ms Zelinski can communicate with residents in a way they may not have been able to in years.

Valerie Chu, the coordinator of the scheme, said the difference that these volunteers had made was enormous.

“These people have offered friendship and company to those who have needed it most,” Ms Chu said. “Our whole community owes them a great debt of gratitude.”

Ann Ona Kapocius, originally from Lithuania, was also among the first volunteers to participate in the scheme and has visited more than 100 residents over the years.

Ms Ona Kapocius remembers every resident and considers every visit extremely worthwhile.

“I have learned so much from them,” Ms Ona Kapocius said. “The talks about life make all my small problems disappear.”

The Community Visitors Scheme 20 year anniversary celebration will begin at 2pm on Wednesday, 12 March at the Kerry Packer Education Centre, RPA.

Day of celebration

This year Sydney Local Health District will mark Close the Gap Day by recognising the efforts and initiatives established to improve the health of our Aboriginal community members with an event at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

The event will begin at 11am on Thursday, March 20 with formal proceedings in the R.L Harris Room, KPEC Building, followed by activities on the KGV lawn. The day will include guest speakers, cultural performances, great food and a sharing of information on how to access local health services.

The district will also hold a special event to celebrate Harmony Day at Concord Hospital with multicultural performances, food and cooking demonstrations. Local school students will participate in a parade of national costumes and performances while staff will promote multilingual health and medication resources. This event will begin at midday on Friday, 21 March on the Green, Concord Hospital.

Aboriginal Health

One of the main aims of the Aboriginal Health Service is to inform and educate other district services and the Aboriginal communities of the programs and health initiatives that are available to them.

We aim to make Aboriginal Health everyone’s business and to engage Aboriginal communities to achieve the best outcomes to Close the Gap in health inequity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Balmain Hospital will also host a National Sorry Day event on May 26 with cultural performers and music, welcome to country, guest speakers and morning tea.

The BreastScreen mobile van will be located at 150 Pitt Street, Redfern, for two weeks from 3 March with a special drop-in service for Aboriginal women to receive free screening mammograms.

The AHS has many other current health initiatives and upcoming events in 2014 and we look forward to providing updates in future issues of HealthMatters.

Education and Workforce Development

Until recently the Centre for Education and Workforce Development had been a shared service between Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts, but is now dedicated to providing education and training services to SLHD. This has been a great opportunity for a review of our services has also resulted in an education model as a framework for the services that we provide.

The model includes seven portfolios that align with the strategic direction of SLHD, all of the courses and programs that we deliver have been grouped into individual portfolios. This model has been used for the framework of our Course Calendar, which was released in January, and can be found in our course handbooks from the end of March.

We are also working on a new interactive website to make it easier for all staff of SLHD to engage with us.

An education launch will be held in each facility across the district at the end of March including a barbecue lunch and demonstration of our new website.
Mental Health

The Sydney LHD Mental Health Service is keenly awaiting the completion of the new inpatient facility at RPA.

The Northwest Precinct Building on Missenden Road between KGV and QEII has been constructed quickly and is now at its full height. Teams of clinicians and University of Sydney academics in partnership with architects, builders and designers are working to create a space to provide modern care for inpatients and day patients at the RPA campus.

In late 2013, a steering committee, chaired by Chief Executive Dr Anderson, was established to work on the improvement of the overall health outcomes of people living with mental illness. This has brought together the skills of the Inner West Sydney Medicare Local, the University of Sydney, LHD clinical streams along with consumer and carer advocates. The task is to make a difference to growing morbidity and mortality rate amongst people who live with mental illness when compared with the general population. It will be a challenge, but the combined knowledge and skill, together with a dedicated focus on the tasks ahead should see improvements over the next five years.

Drug Health

Since 2011, South Western Sydney Local Health District has hosted delivery of Drug Health Services across Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health District under an Inter-District Agreement. This Agreement ceased on 2 December 2013 and separation of governance has commenced. This will provide an exciting opportunity for the Drug Health Services executive to focus on local issues in Sydney Local Health District and provide a greater level of support to clinical services. One of the early priorities will be to review the strategic priorities for the delivery of drug and alcohol services across the continuum of care.

To start this process an external consultant has been engaged to consult with all staff regarding current workplace culture and issues and to assist with development of a renewed strategic direction for the service. A range of key projects will be developed addressing service improvement issues.

Call to action for flu vaccination

For most people influenza results in an unpleasant few days but for others the health consequences can be devastating and even fatal.

In 2013 influenza caused 119 ICU admissions and 35 deaths in NSW.

Dr Leena Gupta, Director of Sydney Local Health District Public Health Unit, said it was important for all staff members to take advantage of the free flu vaccination to protect their patients, families and themselves.

“Vaccination is the most effective way to protect patients and loved ones as 20 to 30 per cent of people carrying the influenza virus experience no symptoms,” Dr Gupta said.

“Anyone can suffer from severe influenza but the elderly, pregnant women and those with pre-existing medical conditions are most at risk of complications including chest infections and increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

“Sydney LHD cares for thousands of patients every year whose age or poor health means flu could have a serious impact on their lives.

“We are proud that so many of our staff members are choosing to protect their patients by being vaccinated but there is still much room for improvement.

Dr Gupta said the vaccine was safe and effective, despite some common myths and misconceptions.

“It is impossible to get the flu from the vaccine as it doesn’t contain live viruses,” Dr Gupta said. “A small number of people may experience symptoms such as aching muscles, but this is just the immune system responding to the vaccine and is far less serious than having the flu.”
Harvard University’s top ten flu myths

You can catch flu from the vaccine. The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus that can’t transmit infection. However, it does take a week or two to get protection from the vaccine.

Healthy people don’t need to be vaccinated. There are groups more at risk of complications from flu, but anyone can suffer severe influenza and transmit the virus to others.

Getting the flu vaccination is all you need to do to protect yourself from the flu. People should also avoid contact with people who have the flu, wash hands frequently, and consider taking anti-viral medications if you were exposed to the flu before being vaccinated.

The flu is just a bad cold. Influenza may cause bad cold symptoms but each year a number of people are hospitalised and die from influenza.

You can’t spread the flu if you’re feeling well. Between 20 per cent to 30 per cent of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms.

You don’t need to get a flu shot every year. The influenza virus changes each year so it is important you have immunity to the strains most likely to cause an outbreak.

Once you’ve had the flu vaccine, you’re protected for life. The viruses that cause flu can change each year so annual vaccination is required to protect against new strains.

I’m pregnant, and getting the flu jab will affect my baby. The flu can have serious consequences for pregnant women and their babies so pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy, should be vaccinated. Vaccination while pregnant can also protect a baby from the flu after they are born and during the early months of life.

Feed a cold, starve a fever. If you have the flu (or a cold) and a fever, you need more fluids. Though you may have no appetite, “starving” yourself will accomplish little and poor nutrition will not assist recovery.

Flu can be treated with antibiotics. Viruses cause flu and antibiotics only work against bacteria. You may be prescribed antiviral medicines to treat your flu. Antivirals do not cure flu but they can make you less infectious to others and can reduce the length of time that you may be ill.


Marching orders

We all know that getting the flu can really get you down, but for some high-risk people it can be much worse – and can lead to life threatening complications.

It is important that all healthcare workers get vaccinated against influenza – to protect their patients – and themselves.

The flu shot is the most tangible way to protect against the spread of the flu.

I urge you to make sure you get vaccinated – and help us to reduce infection rates this season.
UPDATE

Oral Health Services
Sydney Dental Hospital is fully engaged in the workplace project aimed at improving organisational culture. The project aims to design, deliver and evaluate a change management program to improve the hospital’s culture and increase staff engagement. Several events will be over the coming months starting with Harmony Day, 21 March, which will be an opportunity to celebrate the hospital’s culturally diverse workforce.

Employee of the Month Awards has been reinvigorated to recognise and reward high achieving staff.

As at 31 December 2013, the service has significantly exceeded the required clinical activity target for the National Partnership Agreement (NPA). The NPA is a Commonwealth-funded initiative intended increase access to public dental services for eligible patients. The Service has achieved this target through a combination on inhouse activity and engagement with the private sector thought the Oral Health Fee For Service Scheme. The efforts of all support and clinical staff are acknowledged in this achievement.

Population Health
Population Health aims to protect and promote the health of the local population of Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts and to achieve equity of health status and health service utilisation across the various population groups.

Our services focus on improving the health of the whole population and communities within it by protecting them from illnesses caused by, for instance, infectious diseases and environmental dangers, by creating physical and social environments that promote good health and by assisting individuals and groups to adopt health promoting behaviours. To help us achieve all this we monitor the health of the local population to identify trends, conduct research to identify the causes of health and illness and evaluate programs. We work closely with many partners in other government departments, non-government organisations and the community.

For the past three years, Population Health has been providing services to both Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts. This arrangement will finish in the near future and both Districts will have their own Population Health service.

Fighting fit at work

They say if you are paid to do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.

For Kristen Gordon, a CPR Clinical Nurse Consultant at Royal Prince Alfred, that’s exercise and she gets it in spades at work.

“In the field of resuscitation, rapid response time is crucial so this means I literally run to cardiac arrest calls and then, if needed, provide chest compressions,” Ms Gordon said.

“Sometimes we need to run down the stairs and up to level 11 so you can be really short of breath by the time you get up there and effective good quality chest compressions are a taxing full body exercise that should leave most people dripping with sweat.”

Sydney Local Health District Population Health recently released the Step by Step guidebook, which encourages staff to monitor their physical activity with pedometers and sets targets for healthy benchmarks if necessary.

The guide advises that walking for 30 minutes, or at least 7,500 steps, five days per week is all that is needed for significant health benefits.

“I look at it as a privilege to be able to take the stairs because there’re probably lots of patients who wish that they were well enough to take the stairs, so why don’t we keep the elevators free for the patients who need them,” Ms Gordon said.

“Exercise is my passion so focussing on the exercise I’m lucky enough to get at work makes work less taxing.”

Ms Gordon began her love of fitness as a sprinter and then competed in power lifting at a national level in her home country Canada, where personal bests included squatting and deadlifting twice her bodyweight without assistive equipment. She now competes in the CrossFit program.

Ms Gordon featured in the March edition of Women’s Health magazine in a story on jobs that help maintain fitness while at work.
A lifetime of achievement

After 45 years at RPA, Professor Douglas Joshua is stepping down from his role as Director of the Institute of Haematology, a department which didn’t exist when he began as a medical student in 1968.

“It was a completely different hospital back then. We had patients on verandas, dialysis and intubation in the wards, exploratory laparotomies … we did things that you would never dream of doing today,” Professor Joshua said.

“There were virtually no specialty units, very few medications to use, and there was no such thing as medical oncology, no treatment for advanced cancer and no concept of palliative care.”

Professor Joshua feels fortunate to have played a part in transforming RPA into an internationally recognised research institution and “the jewel in the crown of the NSW health system”.

“RPA is a big part of the international research community in certain fields. We’ve had a very high profile in myeloma and in acute leukaemia and lymphoma, and we’ve held a number of international meetings,” Prof Joshua said.

“The beauty of Prince Alfred is that there is an ethos and an atmosphere that is second to none. It’s a hospital that’s free of prejudice, that respects innovation, that respects equality, that is not driven by financial rewards … it has a very collegiate atmosphere.”

Professor Joshua said stepping down as head of haematology would allow more time to travel with his wife and visit their three children and nine grandchildren, although he would continue to supervise transfusion research as an honorary attachment to the department.

“The next generation has so much to look forward to. You cannot even imagine what we’re going to be doing in medicine in the next 45 years,” he said.

“My teachers all graduated before penicillin was discovered and I was taught that some diseases would always be fatal yet now they can be treated with simple drugs. There’s a certain degree of excitement which medicine generates and people should carry that forward. Don’t ever let it go.”

District Highlights

Often when patients are well enough to leave hospital they need a little support to complete their recovery at home and get back into the rhythm of life.

Sydney Local Health District’s Transitional Aged Care Program helps these patients by providing everything from low intensity therapy to practical assistance with transport, laundry and shopping.

Paul Hawker lives alone in Five Dock and has a 20 year history of chronic illness including type 1 diabetes, ischemic heart disease, and lymphoma.

After a recent fall and hospitalisation, the TACP assessed Mr Hawker’s needs and developed a customised care plan.

His case manager, Christina Smith, said the plan included physiotherapy, dietetic follow up, assistance with personal care, housework, shopping and transport to medical appointments.

“The program has greatly improved Mr Hawker’s ability to remain in his own home and reduced the need for hospital admissions,” Ms Smith said. “The intervals between hospitalisations have even become much longer, which is better for everyone.”
UPDATE

Community and Consumer Participation

The Community and Consumer Participation Unit is currently setting up the Community and Consumer Advisory Council for Sydney Local Health District. The CCAC will work together to help shape health care priorities, goals, initiatives and future directions for SLHD.

The CCAC will include members from a broad range of community groups and backgrounds who can act as representatives for their community. Culturally and linguistically diverse, youth, mental health, homelessness, people with disabilities, people who identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian or transgendered and other community groups will be represented. Current community representatives from facilities will also be invited to attend meetings.

The CCAC will be co-chaired by Dr Teresa Anderson and a community representative. Meetings will be held monthly and commence in March.

Terms of reference, an expression of interest form and an invitation letter from Dr Anderson have been circulated widely through NGO networks, businesses, service streams and community groups within the catchment area of SLHD, calling for membership.

Performance and Monitoring

The Performance Monitoring, Systems Improvement and Innovation Unit will be releasing a new app on STARS this month focusing on the National Weighted Activity Unit – the currency in which all ABF activity is expressed. This new app enables the LHD, facilities and our clinicians to better understand relativities in price and thereby make more informed decisions about the setting and modality in which to provide patient care.

The new app will allow users to review the NWAU results for acute admitted patients against target across SLHD. The Performance Monitoring, Systems Improvement and Innovation Unit – the currency in which all ABF activity is expressed.

Mental health unit nears completion

The NSW Minister for Mental Health Kevin Humphries was on hand to help toast the major developmental milestone with a tree planting ceremony.

The new unit is co-funded by the NSW Government, Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney and is due to open later this year with 40 relocated mental health beds plus seven mental health unit research beds. There will also be capacity for additional mental health facilities and ambulatory care services in the future.

Topping out ceremonies date back to the year 700 when Scandinavians would lay sheaths of grain at the highest point of a building for good luck.

Helping others help themselves

Each year, Sydney Local Health District shares more than $16 million in grants among 29 non-government organisations, one of which is We Help Ourselves (WHOS).

Formed in 1972, WHOS provides a residential inpatient service for people who are dependent on opioids and have trouble complying with outpatient methadone programs.

“When people are spiralling out of control, we’re the group that can help them stabilise their mental health and their opioid substitution, and get them to the stage where they can start planning their next step,” said WHOS executive director Garth Popple.

“Some people just can’t decrease their use of methadone as an outpatient. For them it’s just not possible to withdraw without support.”

Mr Popple said WHOS was the only NGO in Australia approved to provide residential opioid services in-house, which greatly enhances their ability to assist clients.

The organisation manages a total of 128 beds for a mix of clients including those who are dependent on opioids, coming off methadone and drug free.

“Our drug free services are for clients who have been deemed ready to stop using methadone but still need help to get back on track,” Mr Popple said.

“WHOS staff also provide outreach, aftercare and family support to individuals on opioid substitution treatment, providing case management while in treatment and after completion of the program.”
Rapid results during Mardi Gras

To coincide with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, Sydney Local Health District’s Sexual Health Service has launched a range of new strategies to increase HIV testing among gay men.

In 2012, NSW saw a 24 per cent rise in HIV infections and Sydney Local Health District has the second highest number of people living with HIV in NSW.

Associate Professor Catherine O’Connor, Director of Sexual Health SLHD, said increasing testing was the most effective way to drive down new infection rates.

“Early diagnosis is important for preventing new infections but also for enabling early treatment,” A/Prof O’Connor said.

“Late last year we launched a-Test in Newtown, which allows rapid, free and confidential testing to local gay men and men who have sex with men.

“Operating hours at a-Test and the RPA Sexual Health clinic have been increased in the lead up to Mardi Gras to allow for early morning, lunch time and evening appointments.”

SLHD Sexual Health also recently held a promotional stall at the Mardi Gras Fair Day event and street level marketing activities to promote the a-Test service.

The retro ‘Ending HIV’ caravan has been parked in front of Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, providing free safe sex supplies, information and facilitating HIV testing.

The forgotten victims

Last year between 14 and 17 per cent of people diagnosed with HIV in NSW were heterosexual and from a range of different backgrounds.

To continue supporting these people, their families and partners, Sydney Local Health District will host the Ending Heterosexual HIV - Pozhet Service Launch on March 26. The launch will be officially opened by global activist and leader of Australia’s Ending HIV campaign, Bill Whittaker.

Pozhet has provided services to heterosexual people with HIV since 1994, but the launch will introduce the new Pozhet 2014-2017 Strategic Plan and a range of new resources.

Associate Professor Catherine O’Connor, Director of Sexual Health SLHD, said the new resources would make information and support easier to access than ever before.

“There will now be a dedicated Pozhet website and Facebook page capable of providing information and news directly to patients, as well as a new comprehensive service brochure,” A/Prof O’Connor said.

“The new strategic plan has also produced information resources for people living with HIV and considering having a baby, or for people in HIV discordant relationships.

“These resources address some of the most difficult issues and questions that confront a heterosexual person who is diagnosed with HIV.”

Meeting of minds to end HIV

The NSW HIV strategy sets ambitious targets that will require new ideas and approaches.

To help drive this change and generate ideas, the Sydney Local Health District recently gathered representatives from across sexual health and drug health sectors for the Ending HIV Forum.

Speakers included Dr Jo Mitchell, NSW Director of the Centre for Population Health, Dr Leena Gupta, Director of the Sydney LHD Public Health Unit, SLHD, and Associate Professor David Wilson of the Kirby Institute.

Dr Teresa Anderson, Sydney LHD Chief Executive, said the forum provided an opportunity for discussion, the sharing of knowledge and future planning for services.

“This is an exciting and challenging time to be working in this area, with the advent of breakthroughs in the treatment of HIV and a NSW HIV Strategy that aims for virtual elimination of HIV transmission by 2020,” Dr Anderson said.

“We cannot achieve the targets of the NSW HIV Strategy without our partners and we have a proud history of our sexual health service working in partnership with other service and care providers.”

The NSW HIV Strategy (2012-2015) calls for improved access to HIV testing, treatments and support, as well as the provision of care services in the community, to improve the health of people living with HIV.
MPs welcome future doctors

Member for Strathfield Charles Casuscelli and Member for Drummoyne John Sidoti visited Concord Hospital recently to personally welcome 32 new medical graduates starting their internships at the hospital this year.

Mr Casuscelli said Concord was among the greatest beneficiaries relative to its size from the record 959 interns starting internships in the state’s public hospitals this year.

“Medical internships are a thrilling opportunity for those undertaking them,” Mr Casuscelli said. “Not only are these doctors-in-training seeing our dedicated hospital staff in action but they are learning to care for the community firsthand.”

Mr Sidoti said the size of the intern intake at the hospital was a strong endorsement of its popularity among medical students.

“The commitment to care demonstrated by those at Concord Hospital is renowned and I’m pleased to see these interns learning from the best,” said Mr Sidoti.

NSW employs more interns than any other state or territory in Australia with 959 intern places available, an increase of 32 positions compared to last year.

The NSW Government has committed more than $105 million this year to support intern training and NSW is the only state or territory to offer two-year employment contracts to medical graduates.
A powerhouse on our doorstep

Obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease are the leading causes of death, disability and reduced quality of life in Australia.

These will be the initial areas of focus for the newly completed $385 million research and education hub within the Charles Perkins Centre.

The new centre will accommodate more than 1,500 students and 900 research staff and higher degree by research students throughout a 49,500 square metre campus including state-of-the-art wet and dry laboratories and a biobank.

“This centre will bring together some of the best academics, researchers and health professionals from the University of Sydney, Royal Prince Alfred and beyond,” said Dr Teresa Anderson.

“These experts will be able to forge new research partnerships and collaborate to make ground breaking advances in the treatment and prevention of some of the most harmful medical conditions.”

The centre’s 1,800 square metre clinical research facility will be collaboratively managed by the university and Sydney LHD and includes a metabolic kitchen, interview areas, clinic rooms, gymnasiums, physical testing facilities, phlebotomy bays and eight day-stay beds.

A star performer

Sydney Local Health District’s Performance Unit was only established last year but already the team, led by Charlie Farah, has developed a revolutionary information service likely be adopted throughout NSW.

The Performance Unit is tasked with providing a centralised source of data for the District, including everything from performance monitoring and casemix to coding and clinical costing.

“We’re basically the source of all truth and holders of all information for the district,” Mr Farah said.

“STARS is a new reporting tool that we launched towards the end of last year and it has proven a great success.”

Mr Farah said anyone could interact with data in a flexible way to produce exactly the information they were after.

“We can compare facilities and specialties and clinicians against each other down to the patient level to see if there’s any variation in their practices,” Mr Farah said.

“We can also compare our length of stay, complications and patient outcomes to elsewhere across the state to see if there are efficiencies we could gain.”

Statistics that would otherwise only be available at the end of each quarter could now be obtained incredibly quickly, allowing real-time performance monitoring and faster improvements.

“We were the trail blazers as the first to use STARS and we’ve presented at a number of state forums to the Director General and they’re just as excited as us in terms of what it can offer,” Mr Farah said. “Now we have Northern Sydney LHD and Western Sydney LHD and even the Ministry of Health starting to use it and coming to us for advice.”

Mr Farah said there was potential for STARS to be used right across the state in the future.
Vale Gaye Mackey Hudson

5th June 1954- 12th January 2014

When disaster threatened, Gaye Mackey Hudson was the one you wanted on your team. Gaye, who died in January at age 59 after a battle with cancer, was a capable leader, innovative, collaborative, caring and above all fun to work with.

Never frightened to roll up her sleeves and get her hands dirty, Gaye was able to transcend class and rank, and treated all as equals. She was renowned for her irreverence and wit, for being a great raconteur with a zest for life.

Gaye was a loyal friend, a fierce enemy, a wife, mother, daughter and sister, who will be sadly missed by Doug, Sophie, Jack, Grace, Ella and Belinda and her extended family of colleagues from RPA and beyond.

Gaye was foremost an emergency nurse, completing the Accident and Emergency Nursing Course in 1986 at the College of Nursing in Glebe and working as an educator, clinical nurse specialist and Nursing Unit Manager of the Emergency Department at RPA until 2005.

She was the emergency nurse others aspired to be. She was hard working, dynamic and above all patient-centred. She could think quickly on her feet and was calmly competent in any resuscitation situation.

Gaye had an encyclopaedic knowledge and photographic memory and, prior to the days of computers, was able to handover emergency patients by name, age, diagnosis and treatment plan without the need of notes or prompts.

She moved on to become the District Disaster Coordinator, first at Sydney South West Area Health Service and later at Sydney Local Health District. In this role, she taught hospital administrators, medical and nursing staff in Major Incident Medical Management and Support, Incident Control System and EmergoTrain System.

Gaye had a passion for Disaster and Emergency Management and she was in her element when she was organising the medical teams for the City to Surf, leading a health team to support the NSW Bush Fires in Sussex Inlet, being part of a surgical team going to the Philippines or leading an Australian Medical Response Team to Samoa.

It is fitting that a trust fund has been established in honour of her dedication to emergency and disaster nursing. Donations can be made via the RPA Foundation forms available via the SLHD and facility executives.

UPDATE

Inner West Sydney Medicare Local

Inner West Sydney Medicare Local will hosting its first congress, called Connecting the Community: The Many Ways Journey, on Sunday 16 March at the Concord Medical Education Centre.

The HealthPathways website will be launched at the Congress and the program will include speakers from allied health, general practice, local community organisations, the University of Sydney and Sydney Local Health District. A key focus of the day will be highlighting the various ways we are partnering together to improve health in the Inner West.

The LIGHT Project – Literacy Gap in Health among Target Population – is looking at addressing low health literacy for primary health care consumers in Canterbury, Marrickville and City of Sydney. Work is occurring with selected general practices to educate primary care providers about health literacy and its implications; identify consumers with low health literacy, and connect primary care providers with local lifestyle modification programs.

The project will recruit general practices and allied health practices. For more information see www.iwsml.org.au

Redfern, Croydon, Marrickville Health Centres

Croydon Health Centre is proud to host the RPA Midwifery Group Practice Antenatal Outreach Clinic. The clinic allows pregnant women to access care locally in a health centre setting, and will complement services already provided by early childhood staff. Following this successful model, a new clinic will open at Marrickville Health Centre this year.

Under the services split between Sydney Local Health District and SWSLHD, community paediatric services will be located at Croydon Health Centre with work now underway on determining space requirements. The addition of this team to the Croydon Health Centre will further enhance SLHD Child and Family services.

The mental health co-located GP Clinic recently opened at Redfern Health Centre. This clinic provides physical healthcare for mental health clients who do not have a GP. Mental Health staff refer clients directly to the GP who is able to detect previously unidentified physical health problems and initiate treatment, thus reducing hospitalisation rates.

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Generation why not

Medical student Dominic Lopez has discovered a novel way of learning the ropes in a major hospital.

The 20-year-old works as a volunteer at RPA, packing dialysis equipment, running medical notes between wards and delivering books and magazines to patients.

“I’d love to come back and work at RPA as a doctor after my studies so it’s really helpful to be exposed to the hospital environment and see how everything works,” Mr Lopez said.

“Penny’s story shows that you can’t just have one or two screenings and assume this is sufficient,” Dr Wallace said.

“Although Penny did have a family history of breast cancer, nine out of 10 women who develop breast cancer do not have a family history. We recommend that all women aged 50 to 74 years should have screening mammograms every two years.”

Dr Wallace said that one in nine women in NSW would develop breast cancer in their lifetime.

“The most rewarding parts for me is to see a patient smile and hear them say thankyou, but also to be welcomed by the staff into the wards and for them to say ‘good to see you, I need you to help me with something’,” Mr Lean said.

“The most important thing to me is to help maintain the patient’s dignity and make them feel comfortable. I try to put myself in their shoes.”

Mr Lean’s duties include pretending to be a patient to be diagnosed for medical students in training, many of whom he has seen again years later as doctors and surgeons at RPA.

“It’s nice to watch the hospital and staff grow over the years,” Mr Lean said. “I think the volunteers here feel like they’re all part of a big family.”

Lifesaving tour rolls on

The BreastScreen mobile van is continuing its tour of the Sydney Local Health District providing free mammograms in Redfern, Marrickville and Campsie over the next two months.

Penny Bissett, of Balmain, was diagnosed with an invasive malignant lesion in 2012, thanks to one of her regular screenings at BreastScreen.

“It was lucky that they found the cancer early because it was still very small, and it was too small for me to notice on my own,” Ms Bissett said.

Breastscreen NSW Sydney LHD Service Director, Dr Genevieve Wallace, said Ms Bissett’s story served as an important reminder about the importance of regular screening.

“The work we get to do is really rewarding because it actually helps the efficiency of patient flow and makes a real difference to the patients we interact with.”

Sydney LHD recently recognised the countless hours donated by volunteers across district through its annual Volunteer Appreciation Day celebrations.

Geoffrey Lean, who has volunteered and trained new volunteers at RPA for the past nine years, said the appreciation of staff and patients was all the recognition he needed.

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The mobile van will be at 150 Pitt Street, Redfern (off Redfern Street) from March 3 until March 14. It will then move to Smidmore Street, outside Marrickville Metro Shopping Centre, from 17 March to 24 April, and the front lawn of Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury Road from 28 April to 8 August 2014.

For an appointment call 13 20 50.
Susan Murray
RN/Part-Time CNE on 9W2 at RPA

The best thing about my job is helping people and caring for them. I think it is a privilege to be a part of their hospital journey for better health, which is a very private/personal experience. You see and learn things about patients, a different side of them that even their families may not have seen. Also being the educator is obviously the best part.

A typical day at work for me involves caring for patients, providing education and support to the staff and students; making sure staff are competent and their assessments are all up to date; and developing quality improvement projects based on best practice.

When I’m not at work I like to watch the Sydney Swans play at the Sydney Cricket Ground, go to ballet class, go to the beach or the movies.

When I was a child I wanted to be a ballerina or a paramedic.

The last book I read was My Sister’s Keeper but I haven’t finished it yet. I’m terrible like that - I can’t finish books.

My top three movies are oh I have 5: The Wizard of Oz, Crackerjack, Midnight in Paris, Puberty Blues and the 1970s version of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.

If I had to describe myself in three words or less they would be crazy, kind and loyal.

My colleagues would describe me as funny, loud and late.

A little-known fact about me is I can wiggle my ears.

If I won the lottery I would buy new equipment for the ward, especially observation equipment. There will be a set for every bed! Oh and the usual, travel around the world and buy an awesome beachfront house.

I’m at my happiest when I’m organised at work, my house is tidy (including the washing being done) and I can relax with a cider without feeling guilty.

My guilty pleasure is currently The Carrie Diaries, for which I get teased by my housemates, but usually it would be a giant Freddo Frog with a cup of tea.

It’s not fashionable but I love tucking my shirt in!

I’d love to learn to play the drums, to knit and learn how to speak French fluently.

The best advice I’ve ever been given is by my high school history teacher who said: “never assume anything. Assumption is dangerous”.

Brenton Bragg

When Brenton Bragg accepted a six week interstate transfer to the Sydney South West Area Health Service in 1982, he couldn’t have imagined it was the start of a career spanning more than 32 years and dozens of roles and titles.

“I despised school so got a trade in butchery and entered health as a part-time cleaner to help save up my first deposit,” Mr Bragg said. “I saw the guys walking around with clipboards with their own offices and thought ‘I want to do that’.”

Over more than three decades, Mr Bragg has had countless offices including those of the Manager of Environmental Services, Manager of Security, Business Manager of Drug Health and the Deputy Director of Corporate Services to name a few.

“There are just so many opportunities in health and if you’re lucky enough to work in a teaching hospital they really encourage education and mobility,” Mr Bragg said. “If senior staff see that you will speak up when something can be improved and that you’re not afraid to volunteer to fix it, then that will be recognised.”

Mr Bragg said he was very grateful for his long and successful career in health, and that his advice to those just starting their own health careers was simple.

“Whether you’re pushing a mop or writing a report, do it well, enjoy what you do and value your job,” Mr Bragg said. “I’ve got over 1,000 hours of sick leave and people think I’m crazy for not using them but why would I? I love my job and there still things that I want to achieve before I retire.”

Mr Bragg is currently the Finance and Corporate Manager of Drug Health and said he doesn’t expect quite so many changes for the remainder of his career.

HealthMatters is all about you. We would love to hear your stories.
Simply email sydneymedia@sswahs.nsw.gov.au