When you receive the ultimate gift, it is something you never forget.

That was the experience of Doreen Cheong who received a liver transplant 15 years ago at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

“I was diagnosed with the life threatening liver disease, primary biliary cirrhosis, and was told without a transplant I would not survive 10 years. It was then I was put on the transplant list.

“You live in an anxious world. It got to the point where I thought I have to continue living and if the call comes, the call comes,” she said.

The 75-year-old now spends her time talking about the importance of organ and tissue donation, and focusing on multicultural groups.

“I am full-blooded Chinese and I know families like mine do not like to talk about death. But they need to think that someday it could be their loved one who could be the recipient,” she said.

RPA held its 14th Gift of Life Ceremony on 5 August, a service of remembrance and thanksgiving to all those touched by organ donation and transplantation. It also recognised the great work done by the District, donation and transplant staff.

RPA Clinical Nurse Consultant Myra Sgorbini said having a conversation about organ donation early helps families make a decision at the most difficult time.

“Knowing the wishes of your loved ones and registering on the DonateLife website is very important.

“We have a lot of cultural and linguistically diverse families in the District who think their religion or culture forbids them from donating. These misconceptions are hard to correct at the bedside so talking about it early is the key,” Ms Sgorbini said.
Message from the Chief Executive

I was delighted to take part in NAIDOC Week last month to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and achievements.

It was a great opportunity to recognise the contributions that indigenous Australians make to our country and our society – and particularly, our health services.

Our fourth annual Yaralla Festival will be held on 11 September and I am looking forward to seeing everyone there. It will, no doubt, be another fantastic community day with fun and entertainment showcasing the beautiful grounds of the historic Yaralla Estate at Concord.

The next round of the Pitch will take place at Concord Hospital on 23 September and I am excited to hear the latest ideas from across Sydney Local Health District. This is your chance to think innovatively. No idea is too big or small. I look forward to hearing of new ways to improve our system, better patient experiences, enhance delivery of healthcare and minimise waste.

I also want to pay tribute to Associate Professor Nick Shackel and Senior Registrar Margaret Gleeson. Nick will be leaving Royal Prince Alfred Hospital to be a professor of medicine at Liverpool Hospital and Margaret is retiring after an impressive 25 years at RPA. Both will be dearly missed and I want to thank them both for their contribution to both the hospital and District.

Message from the Chair, District Board

Once again Sydney Local Health District came in on budget. This is a tremendous effort given the number of attendances at our emergency departments have risen in the past year and demand on all areas of our services have increased.

It is a true reflection of the hard work, dedication and passion of all District staff.

The result enables us to fund a whole raft of new services and continue to deliver the best healthcare for all with the capacity to further improve and strengthen our services.

I am looking forward to attending the Budget Roadshows this year which will start on 15 August at the Centre for Education and Workforce Development at Rozelle and feature at another four venues. The roadshows provide a great place for all District staff to get an insight into how our money has been spent and I would invite everyone to come along.

It is nearly time for the Annual General Meeting which allows us to recognise the phenomenal work of all District staff. The event, to be held on 17 November, will provide a snapshot on the District’s achievements in the past 12 months. I encourage everyone to put it in their diaries.

The wheels are already in motion for the 2017 Sydney Innovation and Research Symposium which was a roaring success this year. The event continues to grow and gain momentum, solidifying us as leaders in scientific and medical research. I look forward to seeing it back bigger and better than ever.
The colour of gratitude

War widow Peggy Dickinson has devoted her life to helping others.

Now she has received a helping hand of her own.

The 93-year-old, who walks from her Rhodes home to volunteer at Concord Hospital every day, has had her house painted as part of the Berger Paint for a Mate community program.

"Usually, my 71-year-old son does things like this but I worry about him getting up on a ladder so this was a big help.

"The paint team even fixed and painted my letterbox which had been broken for some time," she said.

Peggy was nominated for the program by Concord Hospital’s Director of Marketing and Community Relations, Alice Kang, in gratitude for her 18 years of service to the hospital and community.

"Peggy has given a good part of her life to Concord Hospital and if we had more Peggys in this world it would be a much better place," Alice said.

"She has been so dedicated and is so well loved by everyone."

After losing her husband to prostate cancer in 2002, volunteering gave Peggy a greater sense of purpose.

"I like to help the nurses and make their lives a bit easier. I really enjoy talking with patients, too. I also love showing school students through the museum and talking about the rich history of the hospital."

And she has no plans to give up any time soon.

"I will volunteer for as long as I am able to. Nothing will stop me."
World-first trial to stem diabetes

Alex David knew he was putting on weight but did not realise how close he was to developing type 2 diabetes.

After a visit to his GP, the father-of-two decided to make a change and visited Royal Prince Alfred Hospital’s Charles Perkins Clinic to join the Boden Institute’s clinical trial into diabetes prevention.

The trial measures how the natural supplements, fibre and ginseng, affect metabolic health and diabetes prevention.

Alex lost eight kilograms while taking supplements for six months and another kilogram during the six month weight maintenance phase.

“My weight had blown out and I was trying to get it down. I had some success but plateaued. I saw an ad for the trial and decided to get involved.

“I had always been borderline diabetic and that was one of the things that prompted me to switch it up,” he said.

For lead researcher, Dr Nick Fuller, the trial will provide vital evidence on how complementary medicines can treat metabolic diseases such as diabetes.

“This is a world-first trial to investigate whether the two supplements help with the management of pre-diabetes and preventing the on-set of type 2 diabetes.

“Complementary medicine is a multi-billion dollar industry but there needs to be more research into how it can help weight loss and prevent long-term effects on the body,” Dr Fuller said.

It has made a huge difference for Alex and his family.

“I learnt a lot of things from the trial including the importance of portion control and exercise. I regularly track my food intake and now my risk of developing type 2 diabetes is greatly reduced.

“I feel great and have more energy to play with my young kids,” he said.

To register for the diabetes prevention program, head to www.metablistrial.com
Light up with a smile

They say a smile lights up a room – all the more reason to get cleaning.

This year’s Dental Health Week, held in the first week of August, encouraged all Australians to take a more preventative, hands-on approach to looking after their teeth, gums and mouth.

The head of Oral Health Promotion and Oral Health Research at Sydney Dental Hospital, Dr Shilpi Ajwani, said the theme, Women and Oral Health, urged women to prioritise their oral health.

“Women are so busy keeping life together for the whole family that their general health and oral health often gets neglected. But what we know is that a healthy mother equals a healthy family.”

“A lot of women do not know that hormones can have an impact on their mouths. Hormonal changes during pregnancy, puberty, menstruation and menopause can have a significant impact on oral health,” she said. Dr Ajwani said Dental Health Week also reminded clinicians of the importance of oral prevention.

“IT gets dental professionals talking about ways to prevent poor oral health. Prevention is very important. It is at the centre of oral health,” she said.

TOP TIPS
for looking after your oral health

• Learn how to brush, floss and look after your mouth properly
• Have regular dental check-ups, every six to 12 months.
• Remember the mouth is a part of the body and a healthy mouth is an indicator of a healthy body

MY DAY
Sally Delaney  Chronic and Complex Care Coordinator, CNS2, Balmain Hospital

06:00 My alarm sounds and I hit the snooze button. I complete a brain training program before I get up and feed the cat.

07:00 I boot up my PC and download lists from the patient flow portal. I check emails and review the clients on my list to check their status via the electronic medical record. I also look after new patients that have been referred by the Aged Care CNS at RPA and other health care workers who alert me to chronic care patients in our hospital.

09:00 I start my rounds and have an informal chat with members of the multidisciplinary team. We discuss the care and coordination of discharge processes for complex patients.

10:00 I attend Case Conference along with the medical team, NUM, social worker and allied health professionals. Each complex case is discussed in detail and strategies and plans of care are initiated to help achieve the best possible outcome for patients.

11:00 The inner detective/investigator in me is ignited as I leave the conference. I meet with patients and their families to discuss resources and services available in the community.

01:30 Patience is a virtue as I follow-up and confirm treatments, education sessions and referrals. I regularly assist the medical team with assessment and evaluation of patients.

03:30 The last part of the day is data entry and documentation. I wash my coffee cup and dishes and tidy my desk. I feel settled and ready to leave when my desk is in order, ready for the following day.

05:00 I walk in the door and say hello to my partner, the children and cat. They all ask “what’s for dinner?”.
NAIDOC WEEK AT RPA

DRY JULY AT CONCORD

DENTAL HEALTH WEEK
For some it is a frosty schooner or glass of wine but, for Dry July this year, Concord Hospital’s Dr Anthony Linton decided to give up his special treat, soft drink.

The oncologist became the fifth highest fundraiser in the country, raising more than $6,700 during July for the Concord Cancer Centre.

“It was challenging. I got sick of drinking mineral water, but knew it would all be worth it.”

Dry July encourages people to give up alcohol or a special treat to help raise funds to improve the wellbeing of people affected by cancer.

For Dr Linton it was an opportunity to recognise the passion and dedication of staff and their tireless efforts to help patients with cancer.

“The funds raised will help us continue to provide support services, patient resources and free transport. These simple things make the lives of cancer patients and their families a little bit easier,” he said.

Motivated by friendly rivalry and support by family, friends and the community, Dr Linton said everyone rallied together to help him achieve the remarkable result.

“I was pleasantly surprised to see how much was raised. This will make a big difference.”

As for the future, Dr Linton wants to continue to keep his soft drink intake to a minimum.

“This has pushed me to persevere with a healthier lifestyle. I also want to continue fundraising for the cancer centre. I would do anything to help my patients,” he said.

IN BRIEF

RPA nurse wins national award

Registered nurse Stevie Duddy has been named the winner of this year's ACNN Neonatal Nurse Excellence Award to be presented at the Australian College of Neonatal Nurses national conference next month. Stevie was nominated by a parent for her commitment to neonatal care at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Long-term NUM bids farewell

After 20 years, long-standing RPA nursing unit manager Sue Rawlings has hung up her stethoscope to embark on a travelling adventure. Sue started in RPA's intensive care unit in 1986 before making her mark as NUM in the coronary care unit. She will be dearly missed by her staff, colleagues and friends at RPA.

Staff get on top of tobacco cessation

Clinicians from SLHD's Mental Health and Drug Health have completed the tobacco treatment training program which focused on cessation strategies including the causes, consequences, treatment and research of cessation, nicotine addiction and cessation techniques. For people living with mental illness, tobacco use is a major factor affecting health and wellbeing and there is consistent evidence that smoking cessation interventions are effective in people with mental illness.
Cousins never forgotten

The Vietnam War has had a profound impact on the life of Pauline James and her family. The mother-of-two lost three cousins including one, 19-year-old Paul Large, who was killed minutes before the Battle of Long Tan ended on 18 August in 1966. “I learnt of my cousin’s death at school. I was only 14 at the time and it was so shocking. Vietnam Veterans Day holds a special importance to me. I will never forget Paul and my other cousins, Michael Noonan and William Wayne Donnelly,” she said.

Mrs James married her husband, Ray, in 1972, just weeks before he embarked on the HMAS Sydney to the front line. “Ray was only 15 when he joined the navy. He tells me it was particularly hard to bring troops back because they could see how much they had been affected by the war,” she said.

Now 50 years on from the Battle of Long Tan, Mrs James continues to pay tribute to Australian diggers as the State President of the Centre Council of Women’s Auxiliary. “We have a program where we make quilts for homeless veterans. Currently, 3,500 Vietnam veterans are sleeping on the street. “I think telling my story helps to keep my cousins’ spirits alive. They were just boys of the Western Plains who lost their lives in Vietnam like thousands of others.” Mrs James will share more of her story at a commemoration ceremony for Vietnam Veterans Day at Concord Repatriation General Hospital on 19 August.

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