Surgeons of the future

This enthusiastic group of 20 students is from Newtown Public School’s robotics club and all have a passion for science and mathematics.

They visited our Institute of Academic Surgery at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital to learn more about robotic surgery and 3D printing, where our surgeons make personalised models of patients’ organs, bones and tissues, or customised prosthetics.

The students were given the opportunity to practise laparoscopic robotic surgery in the skills lab and perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation on interactive simulated patients. These electronic mannequins have measurable blood pressure, breath sounds, heart rhythms and can even moan in pain.
Executive Messages

APRIL 2018

Message from the Chief Executive

It was a pleasure to launch Australia’s first national institute for eating disorders at the Charles Perkins Centre recently, with support from the Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt and NSW Mental Health Minister Tanya Davies.

The InsideOut institute, a collaboration between Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney, will help progress treatment and support for more than one million Australians living with an eating disorder.

The District has been working hard to drive change in this area for many years and we will continue to lead, while broadening our mandate to prioritise research and the translation of research findings into practice.

I’d like to congratulate Dr Sarah Maguire and her team, who have worked tirelessly to bring this research institute to fruition.

Dr Teresa Anderson
Sydney Local Health District
Chief Executive

The weather has already turned a little colder and that means winter is on its way. Last year, more than 128,000 people across NSW were affected by influenza with more than 650 deaths from related complications.

The flu vaccine is available to everyone through GPs, and is free for children aged six months to five years, those over 65, pregnant, Aboriginal or with conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart problems.

Our staff play a key role in preventing the spread of flu and our own vaccination program has begun. For the protection of vulnerable patients, all staff working in high risk patient care areas must get their flu shot by 1 June.

To help prevent the spread of flu, please remember to cough and sneeze into your elbow, clean your hands regularly and stay home if you are sick. For more information, visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/flu

Message from the Chair, District Board

It is another busy month ahead and I’m excited that work is starting on the $341 million redevelopment of Concord Hospital with plans already underway to temporarily relocate Drug Health Services so several buildings can be demolished.

Ward 64 (withdrawal management) will move to the Professor Marie Bashir Centre at RPA while ward 65 (stabilisation) will move into the main building at Concord Hospital.

Drug Health staff will continue to care for patients at both sites and the wards will remain linked.

This month we celebrated International Midwives Day on 5 May and Nurses Day on 12 May, a great opportunity for us all to thank thousands of our most important staff for the extraordinary work they do each and every day.

It is now only about six weeks until our 2018 Innovation Symposium at Australian Technology Park. This year will see events held over five days from 19 June. This year will include a patient and family experience symposium, women’s leadership breakfast, The Big Idea, a research and innovation education series, clinical trials showcase and the Sydney Robotics Summit, in addition to the main event.

I encourage you all to come along and hear more about the innovative, world-leading work being conducted across the District.

The Hon. Ron Phillips
Sydney Local Health District
Board Chairman
Farewell for RPA pioneer

Dr Carolyn West set up the first adult spina bifida service in NSW in 1982 in a converted shed on the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital campus.

This month she’s saying goodbye to the hospital and her patients – some in her care since they were born.

A paediatrician and rehabilitation physician, Dr West pushed to establish an adult service to cater for the first cohort of patients with complex spina bifida surviving childhood.

Up until the 1960s, most of these children died, but the introduction of shunts to treat hydrocephalus (water on the brain) meant an increasing proportion achieved adulthood.

“My oldest patients are now in their 50s. They are the pioneer group,” Dr West says.

Spina bifida describes a group of abnormalities which occurs within the first four weeks of a pregnancy when a baby’s developing spine (neural tube) fails to close properly, leaving the nerves exposed and damaged. This leads to a range of motor and sensory problems, bowel and bladder disturbances.

The condition occurs in about 1 in 1,000 pregnancies, although there has been a 15 per cent decrease in neural tube defects since the introduction of mandatory folic acid fortification in wheat flour for bread-making in 2009.

For patient Tyson Saunders, Dr West’s retirement is life-changing.

He first saw her as a newborn 30 years ago at the Children’s Hospital at Camperdown and travelled from his home on the Central Coast for her last clinic.

“I have grown up with her. She’s been a constant in my life.”

But Dr West won’t be forgetting him – or her other patients – soon.

“I thought it would be hard to leave the children’s hospital; I think this may be a little harder,” she says.

“I’ve said to some of the patients ‘I’m going to be checking up on you; I want to know you are going well.’”

The clinic will now be run by rehabilitation physician Dr Abraham “Patrick” Arulanandam.

Patient Tyson Saunders travelled from the Central Coast to attend Dr West’s final clinic.
World-first cure for blood disorder

In a world first, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital clinicians are among an international team to have found a gene therapy cure for thalassaemia, a condition where sufferers must undergo regular blood transfusions and treatments for iron-overload for life.

Thalassaemia is the most common genetic disorder in the world, affecting more than 280 million people. Almost half a million people worldwide and up to 1,000 Australians suffer from the severe form of this disease. Those affected produce fewer red blood cells and less haemoglobin, which means less oxygen is delivered around the body.

In a breakthrough clinical trial, published in The New England Journal of Medicine, 22 participants with severe beta thalassaemia across three sites (United States, Thailand and Australia) had their own blood stem cells extracted. Scientists in the United States then inserted a healthy copy of the affected gene into the stem cells that were maintained outside the body. Back home, the Australian patients were given chemotherapy prior to receiving their own genetically modified cells by intravenous infusion.

Following the trial, 15 of the participants no longer needed blood transfusions. The remaining 7 still received transfusions but only needed one quarter of the volume compared to their previous requirements. The follow-up since the time of infusion is two years.

Trial lead and head of Cell and Molecular Therapies a RPA, Professor John Rasko AO, said the results build on many recent breakthroughs in gene therapy to treat immune deficiencies, blindness, haemophilia and leukaemia.

For participant Jack Saenprasert, 38, from Rockdale, the trial has been life-changing. A chef and father of four, he underwent monthly blood transfusions at RPA for nine years. Since receiving his own gene-modified cells about two and a half years ago, he has not needed a blood transfusion.

Stacey Wong, 28, from Blacktown, also participated in the trial. She still needs transfusions but requires less units of blood less frequently.

“I think the doctors were a little disappointed that I still need transfusions, but I’m not. The number of times I visit the hospital is incidental because my quality of life has significantly improved. I feel so much better than I did before and I’d do it all again in a heartbeat.”

She is now planning her wedding in October and – for the first time – can leave Australia for a month for a holiday.

Bluebird Bio is funding the commercialisation of the gene therapy trial.

Six donate brains for research

Six former professional athletes have agreed to donate their brains to the new Australian Sports Brain Bank, a joint venture between Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the University of Sydney.

The bank, which is being led by RPA’s head of neuropathology Associate Professor Michael Buckland, aims to advance medical research into concussion and chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a neurodegenerative disease similar to Alzheimer’s disease.

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy has been linked to repeated head impacts in sports like boxing and American football, and was recently diagnosed for the first time in Australian sportsman, former Manly rugby player Barry “Tizza” Taylor.

The first six athletes to pledge include former National Football League player Colin Scotts; former AFL players Sam Blease and Daniel Chick; former rugby union player Peter FitzSimons; and former NRL players Ian Roberts and Shaun Valentine.
Lest we forget

More than 1,000 people joined forces at Concord Hospital to remember the sacrifice of the men and women who have served Australia for the past century.

Gathering before dawn on the Kokoda Memorial Track Walkway, the group was led by John Gatfield and special guest His Excellency General David Hurley, Governor of NSW, for a moving ANZAC service.

A giant display of red poppies now adorns the Kokoda Track at Brays Bay, a tribute to the unsung heroes of Gallipoli and the thousands of service men and women, including doctors and nurses who have embodied the spirit of ANZAC.

Concord Hospital has a proud history and longstanding connection with our veterans and their loved ones and we would like to thank all those who made this morning’s service possible. City of Canada Bay, Concord RSL Club, the RSL Youth Choir, the NSW Corrective Services band, Rotary Club of Concord and Five Dock for providing breakfast, local schools and an army of volunteers from Concord Hospital, Defence, Police and SES.

Nation’s first eating disorders research institute opens

Earlier diagnosis, improved evidence-based treatment and ongoing support during recovery for people living with an eating disorder will be the focus of a new collaborative partnership between Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney.

The InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders, launched by Minister for Mental Health Tanya Davies and Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt, is the first national research hub for the disorder.

“This renewed focus complements the NSW Government’s commitment to improving access to evidence-based care for people with eating disorders,” Mrs Davies said.

“We’ve worked closely with the institute, formerly known as the Centre for Eating and Dieting Disorders, since 2013, to deliver the country’s first dedicated service plan for the challenging illness, it’s been a game-changer for improving care we provide patients and families, so the Institute’s renewed research mission is really exciting.”

Mr Hunt expressed support for the Institute and applauded its commitment to helping the more than one million Australians living with an eating disorder.

“We must continue to challenge stigmas and find better ways to treat this isolating and severe mental illness. I look forward to seeing the results of this collaborative work,” Mr Hunt said.

Dr Sarah Maguire, Director of the InsideOut Institute, said the launch was an important step in driving forward a national research agenda for eating disorders.

“Eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of any mental illness – fortunately, they are solvable. Our research work will explore innovative treatments and better ways to intervene with early intervention,” Dr Maguire said.
Clothing donation welcomed

A generous donation by marketing company Hogarth will help Sydney Local Health District's Sexual Assault Service continue to assist more than 280 people a year.

The service provides 24 hour, seven days a week crisis counselling and medical and forensic examination and treatment for adults and young people aged 14 years and over.

In a show of support, Hogarth staff generously purchased new clothes for sexual assault victims to wear when leaving hospital, as their own clothes are usually retained for testing. The donation included hundreds of underpants, crop tops, socks, leggings, track pants, hoodies, and short and long sleeve t-shirts in a range of sizes for men and women.

“Working with external agencies is an opportunity for increasing knowledge in the corporate sector about sexual assault and its impacts as well and engaging them in the process of contributing towards the delivery of this practical necessity for our clients,” service manager Lisa Simpson said.

“We are very appreciative of the generous donations from Hogarth.”

Speech pathology’s “sound idea” a winner

Patients with Parkinson’s disease will soon benefit from a new weekly singing group.

Up to nine in 10 people with Parkinson’s disease have a speech or voice disorder, typically characterised by slurred speech and a quieter voice. Existing pharmacological and surgical treatments are ineffective at addressing these impairments.

The RPA Speech Pathology department presented research to the inaugural Arts Pitch, which encourages staff and community members to submit ideas to meld art with health.

Led by speech pathologist Jessica Lamond in conjunction with Arterie@RPA head Amanda Solomon and the UltraSounds, a group of clinician-musicians, the applicants proposed a weekly singing workshop designed and run by a speech pathologist and a music therapist.

The proposal was awarded $20,800 to go towards the employment of a speech pathologist, music therapist, musicians and instruments.

The Institute of Academic Surgery was awarded $5700 to run a pilot program for trainees in which difficult conversations with patients and families are simulated with professional actors.

The panel also gave $1,000 to the anaesthetic department at Canterbury Hospital to purchase a projector to transform stark white walls of the anaesthetic bays, where children are prepared for surgery. Images such as outer space and under the ocean will be used to turn the often scary pre-operative process into an exciting adventure.
eMeds goes live at Concord intensive care

Concord Hospital’s Intensive Care Unit has gone live with electronic medication management program, part of the hospital’s digital transformation.

The eMeds milestone is the latest innovation to our electronic clinical systems making patient information available electronically and accessible to doctors, nurses and clinicians at any time.

eMeds replaces paper medical charts with an intuitive electronic record for prescribing, dispensing and administering patient medications. It will be introduced in the 13-bed mixed intensive care and high dependency unit on a six month trial basis.

The project includes enhanced clinical pharmacy services, computers beside every patient’s bed and customisation to support the specialised care delivered in the ICU. Importantly, it will integrate with the electronic medical record in use across the hospital, which improves the continuity of patient care.

The District’s Chief Medical Information Officer, Dr Angus Ritchie, said the ICU implementation was an important step in optimising our electronic information systems to deliver improved quality and safety of patient care.

“We have worked closely with the intensive care doctors, nurses and pharmacists for nearly two years to deliver this project. It will improve the continuity of medication management for patients who are admitted to the ICU. It will also give access to the enhanced decision support systems that are part of eMeds and are proven to reduce medication errors.”

Concord Hospital was the first in NSW to successfully roll-out eMeds in 2015, winning a Prime Minister’s Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management for the project.

The eMeds system is now operational across all in patient areas at Concord and RPA hospitals, with the District’s Health Informatics and ICT Services working toward the implementation of eMeds in maternity and at Canterbury and Balmain in 2018.

Car park well received

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital’s new staff car park, which opened in April, is being well utilised and running smoothly.

The nine-storey car park, located behind the Professor Marie Bashir Centre, was completed in less than 12 months and provides secure, dedicated staff parking 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for more than 2,000 staff.

The car park is fitted with CCTV and emergency call points on each floor and sensor lighting to ensure staff are safe at all times of the day and night.

“I would like to once again thank everyone for their continued patience and cooperation while the car park was under construction.” said Mr Nobby Alcala, acting General Manager, RPA.
Flu vaccine now available – it’s in your hands

Last year, more than 650 people died in NSW from flu-like symptoms and the influenza epidemic affected more than 128,000 people.

The flu vaccine is the best protection against influenza this winter and is available to everyone in our community through GPs.

Flu shots are free for children aged 6 months to 5 years, people over 65 years of age, pregnant women, Aboriginal people and those with medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart problems.

Our staff play a key role in preventing the spread of flu in our community and our hospital staff vaccination program has begun. For the protection of vulnerable patients, all staff working in high risk patient care areas must get their flu shot by 1 June.

To help prevent the spread of flu in the community, please remember to always cough and sneeze into your elbow, clean your hands regularly and stay home if you are sick. For more information, visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/flu