Royal Prince Alfred Hospital played host to some very clever little people from Newington College in Stanmore this month helping to inspire the doctors of tomorrow in the making.

The students, from grades three to six, visited Royal Prince Alfred Hospital’s Institute of Academic Surgery and Chris O’Brien Lifehouse as part of Newington’s “Scientia” (high potential learners) and STEM club programs and were given the opportunity to perform a simulated operation using a surgical robot, suture using the robot and practise cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

“It takes many years of training and hard work to become a surgeon, but it is an incredibly challenging, rewarding and exciting career choice,” says urologist and robotic surgeon Associate Professor Ruban Thanigasalam.

“I hope that showing these young students what we do might inspire some of them to go down that path. Even though the kids are in grades three to six, often unique opportunities such as this will stimulate interest in medicine, surgery and science – and potentially robotic surgery in the future. We may even be standing here in 30 years with one of these kids who has been here for this visit, and as a result, continued through to become a (robotic) surgeon,” he says.

For Gil Gracie, the experience was a stepping stone to a future career.

“I want to be a surgeon one day. It’s like playing video games that save peoples’ lives in real life,” the eight-year old said.

RPA and Chris O’Brien Lifehouse were two of the first hospitals in NSW to have the da Vinci Xi surgical system – one of the world’s most advanced pieces of surgical hardware. RPA also opened the southern hemisphere’s only training centre for robotic surgery earlier this year.
October has been a busy month across the District.

We partnered with the Lebanese Muslim Association to host a specialised health expo for the Canterbury community; the Lantern Club in Roselands turned pink in support of BreastScreen; and our Mental Health service held its highly regarded Living Well photography competition to promote positive messages for those living with mental illnesses.

This month, we also carried on the important conversation of wellbeing among our clinicians by participating in national Loud Shirt Friday – a day aimed at encouraging staff to be as kind to each other as they are every day to our patients. This follows on from the BPTOK program we launched in March and two forums where I met with junior doctors and heard how we can help them through their training.

Next month also promises to be a busy one with Sydney Health Partners holding its research symposium on Tuesday, November 28 from 9am. The symposium will bring together some of the best and brightest in healthcare to network and learn what’s working and what’s next in policy, operations, research and technology. For more information, please visit: sydneyhealthpartners.eventbrite.com.au

And finally, I’d like to acknowledge the big year we’ve had in information technology with the latest being our successful roll out of eHealth NSW’s electronic medication system at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. I’m excited because patients will be the ones who benefit most from the intuitive electronic record system used for prescribing, dispensing and administering patient medications.

Next month we are opening the NSW Health Statewide Biobank at the Professor Marie Bashir Centre on the RPA campus.

This new centre will house a large scale automated storage facility for human biological samples in medical research and will be a valuable research asset for research. It will ensure Sydney Local Health District continues to play a huge role in research across the nation for decades to come.

The latest round of The Pitch saw some very interesting projects take out the honours. One project will improve communication and inclusion for those living with disability, while another will focus on therapy animals. All four presenters received support for their innovations and I’m really looking forward to seeing how the projects progress in improving our approach to patient centred care.

I’d like to acknowledge the generosity of the partnership between Variety, NSW Health and donors in funding ‘Vision For Life’ cameras with a launch earmarked at Canterbury Hospital soon.

The state-of-the-art remote controlled video cameras connect neonatal and paediatric care specialists from the NETS team with paediatric bays in Canterbury Hospital and beyond.

This technology enables the best paediatric specialists to virtually be in the emergency room of any hospital in the country, helping save the lives of sick or injured babies, infants and children.

And finally, I look forward to seeing you all at our annual general meeting where we showcase the amazing work conducted across the District this year.
Getting loud

RPA became a sea of colour this month when it joined forces with 13 other hospitals across NSW for the inaugural Loud Shirt Friday, a day to remind all staff to extend the same kindness to each other as they do to patients.

Loud Shirt Friday builds on the work conducted by the District this year in supporting staff wellbeing. In March, the innovative BPTOK wellbeing program was launched, giving basic physician trainees the skills to improve their mental and physical wellbeing through exercise, meditation, debriefing, nutrition and social connection.

The District also held two forums where the Chief Executive, Dr Teresa Anderson, met with junior doctors to hear how their training can be improved, and monthly meetings have been established to keep the conversation going.

RPA has also recruited additional junior doctors to cover sick days and allocated days off so our junior staff can take the time they need to recover and recoup without feeling like they are letting their colleagues down.

Bright shirts were the order of the day for Loud Shirt Friday.

RPA medical registrar and organiser Dr Louise Ward said that she had also seen firsthand how support could make a difference to wellbeing.

“We felt that it was important to open Loud Shirt Friday to all the staff at RPA. We’ve launched some great initiatives for junior doctor wellbeing this year and this helps to further open conversation, and highlight wellbeing not just for junior doctors but for all staff.

“It was really great to see so many departments dressing up and coming to the barbecue, but also chatting and catching up with each other. Days like this give staff an opportunity to talk about their problems so they know they’re not alone and can seek help,” Dr Ward said.

Sugary drinks phased out early at RPA

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital retailers will no longer sell sugary drinks from November 1 in a continued effort to encourage healthy living.

The drinks are being withdrawn from sale two months ahead of NSW Health’s deadline of removing sugary drinks from all hospitals by December 31.

“Royal Prince Alfred Hospital has an opportunity to lead by example through working with retailers in adopting a state-wide framework two months earlier than planned – and we have been fortunate to have support from our retailers in doing so,” the hospital’s acting general manager Nobby Alcala said.

Staff, patients and visitors will still be able to buy water, juices with no added sugar, diet soft drinks, tea, coffee and milk. Soft drinks purchased externally are permitted within the hospital.

The World Health Organisation recommends a maximum of six teaspoons of sugar per day. A single can of soft drink (375mls) contains about nine teaspoons of sugar, while a 1.25 litre bottle has up to 33 teaspoons of sugar.

“As a health service, we treat the sick but we also work very hard at preventing illness. A sugar laden diet may raise your risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, inflammation, weight gain, fatty liver disease, tooth decay and heart disease,” Mr Alcala said.

Posters and leaflets will be placed throughout RPA to advise staff, patients and visitors of the healthier drink choices.
New hope for liver patients

Clinicians from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the Centenary Institute have discovered a cell which plays a vital role in preventing harmful microbes from spreading throughout the body by accessing the liver.

About 20 Australians die from liver disease each day, with liver cancer the fastest-growing cause of cancer death in Australia.

David Bowen, Patrick Bertolino and Geoff McCaughan have published their work in the prestigious journal *Immunity*.

“These cells act like sentinels; they display arm-like features able to sense dangerous pathogens or microbes in their environment,” said Associate Professor Bertolino.

“When harmful microbes are detected, the same cell recruits an army of white blood cells that destroy the invaders before they cross the liver’s outer membrane and disseminate in the body.”

The newly discovered cell’s role in protecting the liver is significant because from the liver, disease can spread rapidly, said Associate Professor Bowen.

“With each heartbeat, a fifth of our blood goes through the liver, so gut bugs can be carried into the body via the liver. This is why the liver’s ability to fight disease is vitally important.”

This discovery is considered so important because the liver plays a vital role in fighting, not just liver disease, but all diseases.

Microbes can enter our system through the nose as we breathe them in, through the food we eat and also via our blood stream, from mosquitoes, for example.

The liver, a highly vascularised detoxification organ, is critical to clear blood borne pathogens. Those associated with food, such as listeria, can also enter the body by breaching the gut barrier and by directly accessing the liver outer membrane from the abdominal cavity.

The way in which the liver prevents dissemination of these pathogens has been unclear until now.

This significant milestone will deepen scientific knowledge of how the liver effectively fights disease and the new discovery is likely to inform future investigations into the battle against liver disease and liver cancers.

For Graeme Plater, a routine blood test uncovered advanced liver disease.

The grandfather of six was given a liver transplant, currently the only effective treatment for liver disease and cirrhosis. He is now hopeful that there will soon be more options for patients.

The ground-breaking study also involved the Singapore Immunology Network, the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales.
District Highlights
OCTOBER 2017

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District Highlights

WHY I DO
WHAT I DO

Dr Petra Vasic
Dentist, Sydney Dental Hospital

Dentistry is an interesting combination of the two things that I love: art and science.

In my job, I am fortunate enough to solve problems and help people in a variety of different ways. For example, that might come from relieving pain, providing a new set of teeth, or education by providing insight into what is going on in someone’s mouth and helping them look after their teeth for years to come. Helping solve patients’ dental needs keeps me motivated as every mouth is different and no two problems are exactly alike.

Shedding light on women

Health staff from around the state came together at the 6th annual Indigenous Women’s Leadership Summit to discuss everything from their jobs, stress and culture with one common goal: to shed light on female narratives and give indigenous women a platform to talk about their experiences.

Caspa Tull from HealthShare NSW, Sharnee Townsend and Meggan Grose from the NSW Ministry of Health are examples of how indigenous women can be included as female leaders sharing a substantial workload, said Sydney Local Health District’s Toni Smith.

“The networking opportunities were unbelievable,” she said. “We now have a private Facebook page with everyone that was there. Being around your own mob helped to connect in more ways than just the Facebook group,” she said.

The theme of the summit was ‘Realise your Potential’ which aligns with the NSW Aboriginal Workforce Strategic Framework 2016-2020.

Networking opportunities at the Indigenous Women’s Leadership Summit.
District Confidential

OCTOBER 2017

Tour de Concord

Lakemba Lebanese Muslim Association Wellness Expo

The Mental Health Services Conference 2017

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Educator and clinician honoured

One of Concord Hospital’s most esteemed doctors has been awarded the coveted Pride of Concord Award for his outstanding contributions to patient care throughout the year.

Described as “an approachable, understanding, compassionate and empathetic clinician”, Professor Lewis Chan has made an enormous contribution to the culture and standing of the hospital – attributes which epitomise the Pride of Concord.

“I think it is a good principle to look after your patients in the same way that you would look after your family,” Professor Chan said.

He has always been involved in undergraduate and post graduate teaching, and was recently appointed a professor of surgery by the University of Sydney.

“You need to be accessible to staff and patients. Even if I am busy, I am always happy to have a chat. My time does vary, but once you’re in front of me, you’re there until your problem is addressed,” he said.

Being the Director of Prevocational Training for eight years and Chair of Concord General Clinical Training Council have been among his career highlights.

“What I feel most proud of is the work we’ve done with junior doctors and in collectively encouraging people in the department to see value in their academic work.

Along with a framed Concord medal and badge, he has been given a year of free coffee at the hospital, dinner for two at Firedoor restaurant in Surry Hills, and the opportunity to negotiate with the general manager for $5,000 towards professional development.
Just what the doctor ordered

The physical and mental health benefits of exercise are well researched and understood, which is why, for the past 87 years, doctors from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital have taken one day a year to hit the golf course and focus on wellbeing.

“We like the slogan that healthy doctors make healthy patients,” says RPA rheumatologist Dr Bethan Richards.

“Wellbeing is about doing things you love: exercising, clearing the mind, making positive connections with people and debriefing,” she said.

RPA’s head of radiology Dr Richard Waugh has been involved in the games since 1972.

“Golf requires coordination, some skill and is very relaxing. There is camaraderie, good views, and the sport is one that a lot of people like to play,” he said.

Richard Waugh, Bethan Richards, Roy Donnelly and Lynne Pressley joined a select group of teams this year to have won both the Herbert Schlink Cup and the Sandy Grant Cup.

Public health wins award

Sydney Local Health District’s Public Health Unit won a Multicultural Health Communication Award last month for the Bengali resource ‘Protecting your family — a YouTube resource about immunisation’. Congratulations to Leena Gupta, Claire Pearson, Essi Huhtinen and the rest of the team.

EVENTS CALENDAR

PINK Fundraiser Dinner
Tuesday, October 31, 6:30pm
MàZì at Lantern Club
21 Roseland Avenue
Roselands
Register your interest for the PINK fundraiser dinner that raises money for BreastScreen. For more information, visit www.lanternclub.com.au/pink-2017

Sydney Local Health District Annual General Meeting
Thursday, November 2, 4pm
Centre for Education and Workforce Development
Cnr Cecily and Darling Streets
Rozelle
For more information visit www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/agm

Remembrance Day Service
Friday, November 10, 10.30am
Front lawn of Concord Hospital
Remembrance Day commemorates the signing of the peace agreement between Germany and the Allies that ended World War I. On the day, a one minute silence is observed in memory of those who served.

40th Anniversary for NSW Health Care Interpreter Services
Friday, November 17, 6pm
Parliament House
The event is being organised and led by the Sydney Health Care Interpreter Service, Sydney Local Health District. The event will include a launch of a history book covering the 40 year period of this service.