Growing together

We’ve opened the doors on a new Child and Family Health Centre in Forest Lodge. Read all about it on page 7.
Executive Messages

MAY 2019

Message from the Chief Executive

Welcome to another month.

Winter is just around the corner, so I’d like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that we are expecting a severe flu season again this year, which means it is vital that as many people as possible get vaccinated against influenza.

We’ve had thousands of staff answer the call already, and I’d like to say thank you for taking time to look after yourselves and help protect our vulnerable patients and members of the community.

Our mass staff vaccination day at RPA saw more than 1,000 people line up for free flu shots with another 1,800 getting vaccinations at the Staff Health clinic. At Concord, we’ve vaccinated about 1,800 staff; almost 600 at Canterbury and almost 200 at Balmain and the Centre of Education and Workforce Development. If you still haven’t been vaccinated, remember it is compulsory for those working in our intensive care units, maternity and transplant.

It’s been a very busy and exciting month with the opening of our new Child and Family Health Centre at Forest Lodge; Sorry Day celebrations at Marrickville Health Centre; and a week of festivities honouring our amazing nurses and midwives.

This month, we also have the People Matter survey kicking off and I urge you all to get involved. We listen to your views and we implement changes to make our workplaces better for all, so please take the opportunity to fill in the survey and have your say.

In closing, our 2019 Innovation Week is coming up fast. This year the event runs from 24 to 30 June and promises to be bigger than ever before. Please register for events to hear about some of the amazing work being carried out across the District. It’s also a great opportunity to mingle with colleagues – and meet new ones. For more information, please visit slhd.nsw.gov.au/innovationsymposium

Until next time, stay healthy.

Dr Teresa Anderson
Sydney Local Health District
Chief Executive

Message from the Chair, District Board

It’s always exciting when our clinicians are involved in world-firsts. This month, I’d like to extend my congratulations to Professor John Rasko and his team for yet another major medical breakthrough in the treatment of the blood disorder, haemophilia.

You may recall that in 2017, patient Mark Lee was cured of haemophilia B, after undergoing gene therapy in a world-first clinical trial at RPA.

Now Robert Lamberth has become the first person outside the United States to undergo gene therapy for haemophilia A – a more common variant and one which has wiped out most of his family for generations.

This is highly innovative work which is positively changing the future for thousands of people, and again confirms that our clinicians and researchers are among the very best in the world.

Our 2019 Innovation Week is coming up fast and is promising to be an incredible showcase of innovative work being conducted across the District.

This year the event runs from 24 to 30 June, with six main events, including the Sydney Innovation and Research Symposium, to be held at the Hyatt Regency in the city this year.

The week-long program includes coffee get-togethers; a patient and family experience symposium; a women’s leadership breakfast; robotics master classes and the ever-popular clinical trials showcase and The Big Idea, where we might discover the next transformative medical breakthrough.

It’s also a great opportunity to mingle with colleagues – and meet new ones. For more information, and to register for any of the events, please visit slhd.nsw.gov.au/innovationsymposium

I hope to see you there.
As a young doctor in the early 1970s, Phil Harris observed many men in their 40s and 50s dying from heart attacks.

Smoking, high cholesterol diets, high blood pressure, physical inactivity and obesity combined with limited treatment options meant the death rate from heart attack was high. And those patients who didn’t die remained severely debilitated.

“At the time my colleagues said to me, ‘Why would you want to be a cardiologist?’, because there’s nothing you can do with patients who’ve had a heart attack,” Professor Harris said.

“But that turned out to be totally wrong. There have been amazing developments in diagnosis and treatment such as stents, medications and the evolution of safe heart surgery that have dramatically changed the way we treat patients with heart disease.”

Appointed a Staff Specialist in 1986, he rose to the position of RPA’s Head of the Division of Medicine in 1996. He was appointed Clinical Director of Cardiovascular Services for Sydney South West Area Health Service in 2008, a position he continued to hold when Sydney Local Health District was established in 2011.

In addition to his clinical work, Professor Harris received several major research grants and has published hundreds of articles in peer-reviewed journals including the *Lancet*, as well as contributed to numerous textbooks. In 1992, he was appointed Clinical Professor at the University of Sydney’s Central Clinical School.

He also decided he could make a difference in health administration. He has served on the Boards of the Institute of Clinical Excellence, the Clinical Excellence Commission and HealthShare NSW. He was Chair of the Board of South West Sydney Local Health District from 2011 to 2018.

“My desire was always to do what I could for patients but as a doctor, you’re doing it on a one-on-one basis. Being involved in the management of health resources at a higher level allows you to influence the wellbeing of a much larger number of patients,” he said.

As he winds down from full-time clinical practice, Professor Harris says he is grateful to his childhood family GP who urged him to pursue a career as a physician at RPA.

“He argued PA was the best hospital, so I decided to join the best hospital. It’s been an absolutely fulfilling and rewarding experience to be a cardiologist at PA where I’ve fulfilled my boyhood dreams.”

Professor Phil Harris looks back with fondness on a career serving the community
Research at the bleeding edge

Election campaigner Robert Lamberth had more than voting on his mind in the week before Australia went to the polls.

The 40-year-old, from Brisbane, became the first person outside the United States to undergo experimental gene therapy at RPA for the blood disorder, haemophilia A – thanks to decades of research by Professor John Rasko and his team. Robert can’t produce the blood clotting protein, factor 8.

Robert’s infusion comes almost 18 months after patient Mark Lee underwent world-first gene therapy at RPA for haemophilia B, a less common variant of the condition, but equally as debilitating.

The finding was published in the New England Journal of Medicine and was the culmination of more than 20 years’ work.

It has also opened the door to using gene therapy to treat more than 4,000 other genetic disorders, including blindness.

Mark had undergone thrice-weekly infusions since birth of an artificial clotting agent, but has not had a bleed or needed a clotting agent since undergoing gene therapy.

“This really marks a milestone in the history of gene therapy in haemophilia. Every person with haemophilia is sitting on a time bomb, not knowing when their next bleed is going to occur.”

Haemophilia is an inherited disorder where blood does not clot properly due to missing or defective clotting agents.

About 500 males across Australia have the B variant and lack factor 9 clotting agent, while about 2,300 have the A variant and lack factor 8.

People affected experience a wide range of bleeding episodes, usually into the joints or muscles. Episodes can often occur spontaneously, without an obvious cause, or as a result of trauma or injury. Over time, bleeding can cause severe arthritis, chronic pain and disability.
For Viv Freeman, it's all about planting seeds.

She runs the Yurungai Learning Centre at Waterloo, which provides an after school program for indigenous primary students, many of whom come from disadvantaged families.

“Any child can fulfil their dream. You’ve just got to plant the seed and nurture it so that a child can grow-up and be whoever they want to be.”

Recently, a group of students from the centre, which is operated by the children’s charity Barnardos, visited RPA hospital and the Institute of Academic Surgery – and the results were impressive.

“I feel really lucky because if I want to be a doctor I know how to do it because I’ve started training at a very young age,” said Zahara Laumua, 9, as she used one of our training robots to practise suturing.

Tyrone Snaea, 9, was so inspired that he decided he “might be a brain surgeon”, while Micah Day, 7, “learnt about saving people’s lives” by doing chest compressions on a mannequin in our simulated operating theatre.

For Kate McBride, the executive director of RPA Institute of Academic Surgery, student visits are a chance to return to the basics.

“It brings a lot joy to us and reminds us of what we’re doing… and why we do research to make treatment better,” she said.

On a return visit, the students participated in a tour of the hospital, a Q and A session with a surgeon and an art workshop run by Amanda Solomon and her team from Arterie.

“Most of the students had been to a hospital because they were sick or had visited someone else who was a patient. So, it was fantastic to give them a positive experience of a hospital and for them to see it from a different angle,” Amanda said.

The students’ artwork will now be proudly displayed at Yurungai Learning Centre.

“The two days have sparked lots of different conversations among the students,” says Viv. “It was an amazing opportunity for them and a way for us to plant the seed to encourage them to aspire to be whoever they want to be.”
Staff answer the call

Sydney Local Health District staff have answered the call to protect our patients against the flu, with more than 5,300 lining up for free vaccinations.

Almost 3,000 from RPA, 1,800 from Concord, 560 from Canterbury and almost 180 from Balmain and the Centre for Education and Workforce Development have rolled up their sleeves so far – with more lining up daily, including the Chief Executive Dr Teresa Anderson.

One million flu vaccines have already been delivered in NSW this year.

The flu shot is free for pregnant women, Aboriginal people, those aged over 65, and those with medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.

Hospitalisation rates for influenza are highest in young children with recent national figures showing about 100 in 100,000 children aged six to 23 months have needed hospital care.

“With more than 9,600 confirmed influenza cases in NSW already this year, people should call ahead to their GP or pharmacist to get their flu jabs,” says Leena Gupta, Clinical Director of Public Health at Sydney Local Health District.

“While we might all take flu for granted as a common winter disease, it can be deadly,” she said.

“Last year we had a relatively milder flu season, but the 2017 season was severe and we want to avoid a repeat of that by making sure that as many people as possible have their flu shot. It’s important not to be complacent.

For more about the influenza vaccine, please see www.health.nsw.gov.au/flu

DON’T SPREAD FLU

Get a flu shot
Sneeze into your elbow
Clean your hands
Stay at home if sick

It’s in your hands health.nsw.gov.au/flu
New health centre opens doors

The doors are now open at our new Child and Family Health Centre at Forest Lodge.

“Good health in the early years can really set children up for life,” says Miranda Shaw, General Manager of Community Health Services at Sydney Local Health District.

“We are able to provide children with the nursing, medical and allied health services that they need to be able to thrive.”

The purpose-built centre provides a range of services to support children and their families from antenatal care through birth to 12 years of age.

To find out more information on the right service for your family please contact the Child Health Information Link (CHIL) on 02 9562 5400 from 8:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday or see www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/chil

Interpreter services available on request.

At the Forest Lodge centre:

- Midwives provide antenatal care to women during pregnancy for physical check-ups and to assess the baby’s growth and wellbeing;
- Nurses provide health and developmental checks for babies and children plus support, education and information about parenting;
- Paediatricians provide medical assessments for children to help families to learn more about their child’s physical health, growth and emotional health and development;
- Dieticians offer advice on child nutrition, healthy weight ranges, and common nutrition issues like iron deficiency anaemia and cow’s milk protein intolerance;
- Psychologists and social workers provide treatment for children who have difficulty with emotions, social functioning or behaviour;
- Occupational therapists provide assessment and treatment for children who have difficulty with everyday activities like play, self-care, handwriting and getting dressed;
- Physiotherapists provide assessment and treatment for babies and children who have difficulty with the development movement, balance and coordination;
- Speech pathologists provide assessment and treatment for children who have difficulty with communication and feeding, and
- Orthoptists offer assessment to identify, diagnose and manage eye and vision disorders

A welcoming babe

He created the diggers that sit atop the ANZAC Bridge, the statue of Henry Parkes in Centennial Park and nine of the 12 figures that surround the Sydney Cricket Ground and the soon-to be rebuilt football stadium.

He also cast the life-size bronze replica of heart surgeon Dr Victor Chang, outside the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute at Darlinghurst.

And now, renowned Australian craftsman Alan Crawford has donated a brass baby to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Installed at the entrance to RPA Women and Babies, the sculpture was donated in honour of Alan’s twins, Matthew and Elizabeth, born at King George V in 1976.

For Jan White, RPA’s clinical manager for Women’s Health, Neonatology and Paediatrics, the donation shows the strong connections RPA builds with families over decades.

“For most, having a baby is a momentous day. It’s a very special memory. It stays with parents for the rest of their lives. The Crawford family’s decision to donate the sculpture makes me think about the hospital’s history and the people who have come to us – every one of them has their own connections to us,” she said.
Celebrating Innovation Week 24–30 June 2019

Innovation Week is Sydney Local Health District’s annual innovation and research showcase in June bringing together staff, clinicians, experts, and partner organisations to share ideas and foster collaboration. All staff are invited to attend our 2019 Innovation Week program of events.

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For the latest event updates visit slhd.nsw.gov.au/innovationsymposium

*Event listing subject to change. More details to come...