

# HealthMatters

Sydney – it's *your* local health district

ISSUE 87 • FEBRUARY 2021

## Heroes among us



**It has most definitely been the year of the healthcare worker – and what greater honour than to have your image displayed on the sails of the Sydney Opera House on Australia Day.**

Two photos of Sydney Local Health District staff adorned the sails, featuring Houshang Boroumand, Joh Castle and Jane Civitico.

For Houshang, who usually works in Canterbury's emergency department, it was a very proud moment. He came to Australia from Afghanistan at the age of 13 and has spent the past year working between Canterbury and Sydney Airport as part of the Flying Squad, helping screen thousands of travellers each week.

At Government House, we were represented by health commander Sarah Jane Nilsson who was invited to attend



the official Australia Day ceremony hosted by the NSW Governor Her Excellency the Hon Margaret Beazley. Sarah Jane also appeared in an interview televised nationally.

And we were awarded in the Australia Day honours list with Concord's Professor Markus Seibel appointed a Member in the Order

of Australia (AM) for significant service to medical research and to endocrinology, and Yaralla Estate expert Lois Michel, from the City of Canada Bay Heritage Society, awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), for service to the community through heritage societies.





## Message from the Chief Executive



**Dr Teresa Anderson AM**  
*Chief Executive,  
Sydney Local Health District*

**Welcome to 2021. I hope you were all able to find some time to connect with your loved ones over Christmas and New Year, and managed to hit the refresh button for 2021.**

I know you would all agree that last year was a year like no other. After the bushfires ravaged our state, none of us expected a pandemic that would see more than 2.1 million lives lost worldwide, international travel abandoned and cities in lockdown.

We have made great progress in NSW – thanks in part to our own staff going above and beyond in the past year – but the pandemic is still with us and 2021 is already shaping as being as busy as its predecessor.

Our Special Health Accommodation continues to be extremely busy caring for returning travellers, and we are on the verge of rolling out our COVID-19 staff vaccination program across the District, with RPA chosen as one of the 11 vaccination hubs in NSW.

So far this year, we've welcomed almost 100 medical interns, about 250 registered nurses and midwives and 27 allied health workers to Sydney Local Health District.

Most have had to undergo orientation by

Zoom, but will be soon working in our wards and services providing the world-class care that is the hallmark of this District.

We've also welcomed nine graduate health management trainees who will work across our hospitals, services, the Ministry of Health and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare to learn management skills.

Thank you for choosing to work with us. Together, we'll continue to make a difference in the lives of our patients, their families and carers every day.

It's exciting to see that building works are progressing quickly on our new Parents and Babies Unit at RPA, located behind the King George V building.

The new unit will provide specialist care for new mothers with severe mental illness, and will house eight bedrooms plus space and equipment for antenatal care, a 24-hour respite nursery, a mothercraft room, a play area, a retreat room and communal areas to accommodate multiple families with children.

It's an exciting and much-needed project which should be open by the end of this year.

Until next time, stay healthy.

## Message from the Acting Chair, District Board



**Victoria Weekes**  
*Acting Chair,  
Sydney Local Health  
District Board*

**Some of you may be aware that our board chairman Ron Phillips has resigned his position to take a well-earned break.**

I am privileged to be standing in as acting chair until formal appointments are made, but I know you will join me in thanking Ron for his outstanding guidance and leadership over the past 10 years.

Ron was Sydney Local Health District's first chairman, taking up the role when local health districts were created in 2011, and the former Sydney South West Area Health Service was split into two districts.

Under Ron's leadership, Sydney Local Health District has always been – and continues to be – the best performing district in the

state, delivering complex, world-class care to more than one million people a year.

Ron has been a steady hand and a font of wisdom during his time as chair and his extensive experience, sage advice and kind heart will be sorely missed by all, but we wish him the very best in his future endeavours.

During the past year, I have been incredibly impressed with the way our staff have faced the pandemic. Your relentless innovation, collegiality and willingness to do anything needed goes to heart of why this District so special.

It has been an honour to have witnessed you rise and rise again, and I look forward to seeing where this year takes us.



## Kindness reigns at Canterbury

**Samson Cumming was supposed to make his entrance to the world more than six weeks after parents Eloise and Tim had packed up their Lakemba home and moved to the Gold Coast to start a new life.**

But as Eloise was filling the final boxes for the removalist, her waters broke.

Samson was born at Canterbury Hospital the next day, but as a premature baby with a cardiac defect, he needed support in the Special Care Nursery.

With the keys to their house already handed over and their belongings on the way to Queensland, Eloise and Tim were in a bind.

That's when our kind-hearted Canterbury team swung into action, offering them accommodation and making sure Eloise had food and other items after Tim had to make a mercy dash to Queensland to start his new job.

After three weeks of specialist care, Samson was cleared for discharge and Eloise prepared to take him home the next day to Brisbane.

But COVID-19 had other ideas, with state borders closing fast.

"We quickly bought new – very expensive – tickets for that day. The border was closing at 1am the next day so we thought we'd just make it, but when we got to the airport, the flight was cancelled and everyone was told to go home. I just knew I had to try, so I stayed there and pleaded my case."

The kind folk at Virgin Australia worked some magic and got



them the last seats on a flight which should have already left, but had been delayed.

Tiny Samson is now home on the Gold Coast – without needing to go into quarantine – and due for surgery soon to correct his heart defect.

In a letter to Canterbury staff, Eloise praised their "flexibility, creativity, thoughtfulness and kindness demonstrated in every interaction".

"You absolutely went above and beyond. We are incredibly thankful to you for making our experience a lot easier. We have raved to everyone about how good Canterbury was."

## Stress busters for ED

**Emergency departments can be busy, noisy and chaotic, but a new trolley stocked with games, puzzles, art supplies and music is helping reduce the stress for patients.**

"Sometimes, elderly patients become confused and disorientated," says RPA emergency medicine consultant Dr Sinéad Ní Bhraonáin. "Their frustrations with communication, loneliness, anxiety or pain may be expressed as agitation, wandering, frequent requests for help and calling out.

"But, evidence shows that providing therapeutic activities can reduce behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia and improve a patient's mood and ability to function as well as their behaviour."

Armed with \$10,000, staff sought expert advice from clinicians from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and St Vincent's Hospital in Dublin.

One of RPA's volunteers, Loris Perryman, made interactive activity mitts, aprons and blankets, with zips, ribbons, buckles and textured materials. Music, audiobooks and meditation exercises have also been uploaded onto a donated iPod.

The trolley also includes coloured pencils, crayons and pens, writing, sketch and activity books; crossword, Sudoku, and word search puzzles plus stickers, squishy balls, soft toys, playing cards, a kaleidoscope and a magnifying glass.



There are also personal care items such as pre-pasted toothbrushes, paw paw ointment, hair ties, hand cream, hair combs, face masks and reading glasses. Many of the items are single-use products or will be kept by the patient when they're transferred to a ward.



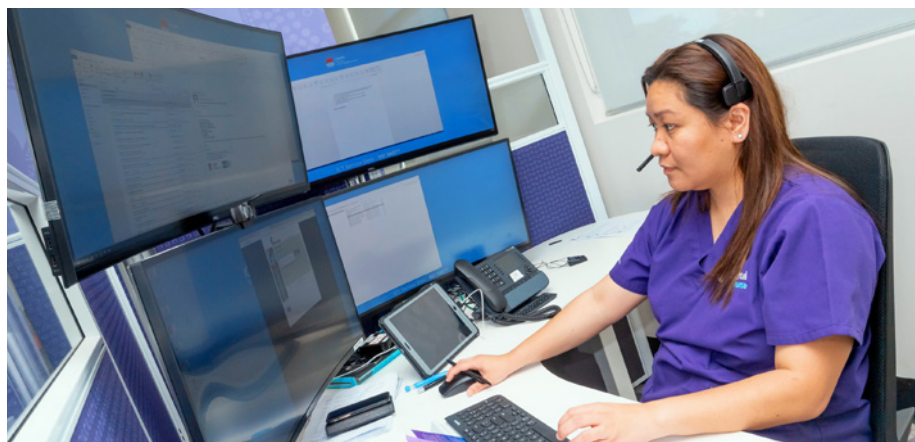
## Grant for COVID-19 research

**Sydney Local Health District has received a grant from the Medical Research Future Fund to investigate innovative systems to improve remote monitoring of non-critical patients with COVID-19.**

The team will look at how the vast amounts of data collected from patients during their treatment by the District's virtual hospital, **rpavirtual** can be better integrated into their electronic medical record (eMR) and aims to develop a universal Australian platform that is compatible with most monitoring devices.

"We've seen remote patient monitoring technology, like pulse oximeters, emerge as a weak link in the virtual hospital model of care," said one of the project's principal investigators Professor Andrew Wilson.

"We don't know much about the reliability of these monitoring devices in real world settings such as patient's homes or quarantine hotels. The data we collect from the oximeters can't be transferred automatically into the



patient's eMR – meaning oftentimes the patients have to read their results aloud to clinicians who are manually entering the data into eMR."

Monitoring patient's blood-oxygen levels is a key indicator of a COVID-19 deterioration – crucial for patients who have been identified as needing monitoring, observation and follow-up in case their symptoms develop to the point of needing acute inpatient care.

The project's other principal investigator, Professor Warwick Britton,

says integration of the data should improve patient outcomes.

"By fully integrating clinical data, we can assist clinicians in spotting trends in a patient's condition, as well as allowing for rapid use of data in process and quality improvement, and research."

The project has recently received approximately \$670,000 from the Medical Research Future Fund, part of a \$4 million announcement for COVID-19 research – but the results will be applicable beyond COVID-19.

## Looking for a research mentor?

**Franklin Women is a social enterprise committed to supporting women in the health and medical research sector. They aim to connect individuals within the research industry and work towards a health and medical research sector where women can thrive.**

RPA's Clinical Geneticist Dr Amali Mallawaarachchi recently completed the six month Franklin Women mentorship program under the guidance of Dr Ben Jalaludin of the Ingham Institute.

"The program gives you an opportunity to reflect and

think about careers goals," says Dr Mallawaarachchi.

"My mentor provided advice and I had the opportunity to learn from his experience.

I am definitely keen on mentorship. It is absolutely an important role."

In 2019, Sydney Local Health District became the first local health district in NSW to participate in the mentor program and become an academic partner of Franklin Women.

Each year, Franklin Women offers a six-month mentor programs for women working

in health and medical research fields. The program pairs women from across a variety of disciplines and health districts with senior research mentors. The mentoring program is aimed at mid-career women and aims to provide leadership guidance.

RPA's Associate Director of Haematology Professor Joy Ho was the District's 2020 mentor for this year's program.

Franklin Women aims are to build a supportive community of researchers within the health and medical field. They advocate for initiatives



*Dr Amali Mallawaarachchi*

addressing barriers for women in research careers, and work to showcase the talented women in the field.

For more information about Franklin Research please visit [franklinwomen.com.au](http://franklinwomen.com.au)

## Thriving at home

**Ryese Holroyd is a typical 14-year-old boy.**

He loves hanging out with friends and riding motocross, but the past year has looked a little different for him with multiple hospital visits and three surgeries at Canterbury Hospital.

After the most recent surgery, Ryese was able to go home much earlier than expected thanks to our new Paediatric Hospital in the Home service.

He returned frequently to have his vacuum-assisted closure dressing changed and his recovery reviewed by his treating team.

"The nurses would call everyday to check on Ryese," says mum Mary. "They are kind-hearted and efficient with their work. I am extremely impressed with the service we received at the hospital and in our home."

Paediatric Hospital in the Home is a specialised service of Sydney Local Health District, offered through Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and now Canterbury Hospital.

Nursing Unit Manager Tanya Tosich was integral in expanding the service to Canterbury's paediatric patients.



"We know that children thrive in their home environment and it's been lovely to facilitate this change," Tanya said.

For more information about the service, please contact the team on 9787 0000.

## We stand on the shoulders

**This month, we've welcomed almost 100 medical interns to our hospitals, but spare a thought for Jessie Aspinall.**

She graduated from medicine at the University of Sydney in 1906, and was offered residency at RPA – the first woman to be given such a position.

Ten days later, a reportedly very capable Jessie was told the conjoint board, made up of members from RPA and the University of Sydney, was refusing to officially appoint a woman doctor.

Her father, Reverend Arthur Ashworth Aspinall, wrote a long letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, protesting the decision, and the letters pages of the *SMH* were filled with responses for several weeks.

One reader claimed it would be "disgusting wickedness" for lady doctors to attend to drunken men who had been in accidents.

Another said that many men had also missed out on appointments but had chosen to "grin and bear it" while Jessie was "hysterically airing her grievances from the housetops".

But most were highly supportive, and eventually the board capitulated – with the caveat that her appointment was "not to be taken as a precedent" and that she must not deal with "certain sex diseases".

Her male peers bought her a gold watch to show their support.

Our story on Jessie was picked up by *Channel 9 News*, and included interviews with RPA interns Tereza



*Pioneering doctor Jessie Aspinall*

Pejovska, Lily Builth-Snoad and Vijidha Rajkumar; and consultant Professor Kate Wyburn, whose grandmother was made to stand outside the hospital during ward rounds when she was a young doctor in the 1920s.



## Staff Spotlight

**Renae van der Pol**  
Senior Allied Health Clinician,  
CORE Team Camperdown



I am an occupational therapist working in community mental health services for the RPA Camperdown Community Health Centre. I've worked for the District since 2007 in a variety of roles, initially within the youth mental health services as a care coordinator supporting young people and their families following a first episode of mental ill health. The age of onset of mental illness generally occurs in late adolescence and therefore initial engagement with services is key to predicting the success of a young person's recovery.

There have been many memorable moments such as wonderful emails from my young people informing me of graduating from university, getting a job or travelling after a protracted episode of illness; the comments received following the completion of the Family Education Group from parents thanking the clinicians for the time, effort and encouragement received; the success of the headspace Early Intervention Team in obtaining a further three years funding to support young people with complex mental health needs, and supervising students who return later to work alongside me as a mental health clinician has supported my ongoing commitment to this area of work.

I feel proud and privileged to work in health. My colleagues and peers continue to teach me how to be a better clinician and provide me with motivation to support and advocate for our consumers.

## Eyes on the future



**We've officially celebrated our new upgraded emergency department at Canterbury Hospital.**

The \$6.5 million expansion includes a dedicated paediatric area, a new entrance and upgrades to the waiting room, triage area, short stay unit and fast track area.

The paediatric area features new treatment spaces, resuscitation and specialist isolation areas and amenities to help the 11,500 children treated at Canterbury each year.

## Top honours

**RPA's Anosh Sivashanmugarajah was named Registrar of the Year at the 2020 AMA (NSW) Doctors-in-Training Awards.**

Anosh was presented with his award by AMA NSW president Dr Danielle McMullen and was described as "an extremely effective and diligent doctor, a skilled and mature clinician beyond his years and highly proficient and evidence-based in his work and practice of medicine".

"His generosity with his time and care extends not only to his patients and direct staff on the team but to all who he encounters, as he genuinely cares for the wellbeing of others.

"He has a reputation for putting patients first – never walking past or ignoring a sick patient – no matter how busy he is."

Two former RPA junior medical officers were also honoured at the 2020 GP Synergy awards, which recognise excellence and ongoing commitment to quality general practice education and training.

Nada Abu Alrub took out Registrar of the Year for New England/ Norwest and Isabel Hanson was named Registrar of the Year for Central Eastern and Sydney.



## Second chance for Maurie

**Maurie is a Vietnam veteran, but for more than six years he was unable to make the trip from his Balmain home to his local park, less than 500 metres away.**

That was until a clinical team from our National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare helped him become mentally and physically able to leave the house.

The centre, based at Concord Hospital, provides Australia's first comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to caring for veterans' physical and mental health related illnesses.

Veterans are linked with case managers who work alongside clinicians from a range of specialities in assessing and managing the needs of veterans, their families and carers.



For Maurie, that included a new motorised scooter which allowed him to make it the park before Christmas to enjoy the spectacular view.

"I'm so damn happy," he says.

He's now planning weekly rides to the local newsagency and park, and wants to organise a family picnic to watch his grandchildren play.

## Fussell House open

**New residential accommodation for veterans receiving care at the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is now open at Concord Hospital.**

Funded by a \$6.7 million contribution from the Commonwealth Government, Fussell House features 19 rooms (single, twin and family rooms) with common living, kitchen, dining and laundry spaces and an outdoor area for the exclusive use of residents.

The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare opened its doors in August 2019, providing a holistic approach to caring for the mental and physical health needs of Australia's veterans in one location.



Fussell House is named after Lieutenant Michael Fussell, who was killed in action by an Improvised Explosive Device while serving with the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan in 2008.

## Signs of success

**Farhad Babul is deaf, non-verbal and uses AUSLAN to communicate, but thanks to his new job at Balmain Hospital, he's feeling respected and able to provide for himself.**

Farhad is the first employee recruited under a new partnership between us and employment service provider WISE Employment to enhance job opportunities for people with a disability.

"It's changed my life," says Farhad, who is on the Environmental Services team.



"I feel like I'm respected. I would like to stay here as long as I can. I want to improve in this life. I want to be independent and be able to provide for myself by working."

Under the partnership, we'll consider candidates, who have skills and abilities that match roles in our hospitals, services and support teams.

Once placed in a position, they'll be offered job coaching, mentoring and training as needed, while workplace support will also be provided to their colleagues and managers.

We'll also work with WISE Employment to build the knowledge and confidence of existing staff in relation to disability and cultural awareness.

Farhad's co-workers have nothing but praise for him.

"He's very dedicated," says his manager Suman Karki.

"He is a hard worker and has high standards. He's always positive and has a smile on his face. He's taught us the sign language for hello, goodbye and thank you," he says.



## First off the blocks



**Catia Ibrahim and Llewellyn Mary Lum Mow were the first babies to arrive in our maternity years for 2021.**

Catia slid in at 1:09am on New Year's Day at Canterbury.

"She's already smiling and laughing," says mum Patricia. "She's so cheeky. She has a strong personality – she knows what she wants and when she wants it."

At RPA, Llewellyn took it a little easier, arriving at 7:47am on New Year's Day.

"Her nickname is Lulu and she's thriving and is sleeping well," says mum Brianna.

"The midwives were amazing and we're thankful for their support. They were cool, calm and collected throughout."

## New role for Bronte



**Former Royal Australian Navy man and independent member of the RSL NSW Veterans Services and Policy Committee Bronte Pollard has now taken on a role to support the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare at Concord Hospital.**

As the RSL NSW Liaison Officer, Bronte will work with the RSL NSW sub-Branch network and Veteran Services Division of RSL LifeCare to connect veterans to the services available at the centre.

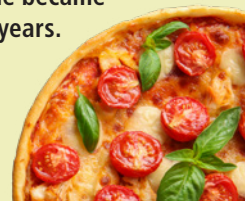
"The National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is an amazing Australian-first treatment program specifically for veterans with complex medical needs and I look forward to RSL NSW, RSL LifeCare and Concord Hospital working collaboratively to connect veterans to the support services they need," Bronte said.

## Pizza with the Lot

**Dominic Lot caused quite a fuss at RPA recently when he became the winner of a free pizza every month for the next 60 years.**

Dominos Pizza offered the prize to the first baby born on its 60th birthday with the name Domino, Dominic or Dominique.

Parents Clementine Oldfield and Anthony Lot had long planned to call their baby Dominic so the win was an added delight.



## Green light on new health centre

**Work is starting soon on new health services for Green Square and Zetland.**

Our RPA HealthOne will be located at 944 Bourke Street, Zetland, while a new child and family health clinic will be established at the Tote building in Joynton Ave, Zetland next year.

For new parents Macy Meng and Alex Ge, the new Child and Family Health Clinic will be much closer to home.

"It'll be so convenient for me because I'll be able to walk there," says Macy.

"I'll be able to chat with the nurse and ask questions about my baby's growth and development."

Since their baby, Brendan, arrived in June, Macy has sought advice from the child and family health nurse at Alexandria Park.

Now, she's also looking forward to making connections with other mums who live locally and use the new clinic.



"We can share our experiences and help each other. Our children will be able to play together and grow-up together."

Refurbishment of the heritage Tote Building is set to start early next year to provide three family-friendly clinic rooms and a separate group room.

## A helping hand

**Jamie Burrows is committed to making life a little better for others.**

She's taken out the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine Wellbeing Individual Award for a range of projects helping RPA ED staff during the pandemic.

She was nominated for developing a program called Wellbeing Outreach While Seconded, or WOWS, which supports our emergency department trainees in getting settled when they are transferred to other locations in our network.

At the beginning of COVID-19, Jamie also revamped the change rooms used by RPA's ED staff needing showers before and after shifts.

She put up wallpaper, provided soaps, hand creams, aromatherapy, flowers and treats to boost morale. And, she was instrumental in supporting Feed Our Heroes which provided 750 meals to our hardworking staff during the pandemic.

