

Concord Connection

The official newsletter of Concord Hospital



Concord microbiologist joins earthquake response

As most of us were winding down for the festive season, Concord Hospital's Dr Tim Gray was preparing to deploy to Vanuatu with the Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) following the 7.3-magnitude earthquake that struck on 17 December 2024.

Tim was part of the Bravo team, the second AUSMAT team deployed to Vanuatu. He joined a 17-person team that arrived in Port Vila – the island nation's capital – on 23 December 2024 to provide surge surgical, general medical, rehabilitation and biomedical engineering support to Port Vila Central Hospital following the earthquake.

"Being away from family during Christmas and New Year definitely had its challenges, I've got young children," he said.



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Sydney
Local Health District



“But witnessing the resilience and the spirit of the Vanuatu people in the face of disaster made it all worthwhile to me. The need was significant and contributing to the recovery ... it was a real honour to be there with them.”

The AUSMAT Bravo team spent two weeks working side by side with local healthcare staff to ensure essential medical services remained accessible to all who needed them.

Tim said he was inspired by the dedication and skills of local staff who carried on with their work in the wake of the earthquake.

“One of the great joys of being there was working alongside the local physicians and the hospital in Port Vila,” he said.

“It was very collegial and I learned a lot from working with them ... They’re incredible physicians – very, very good diagnosticians.”

One of the local professionals Tim worked with closely was laboratory manager Dexter Takau, who revealed he had only recently spent time at Concord Hospital.



Dexter had visited Concord on an Australia Awards Fellowship as part a University of Sydney and Daffodil Centre collaboration for Elimination of Cervical Cancer in the Pacific.

Tim said the Vanuatu deployment was his fifth with AUSMAT and he encouraged staff at Concord to consider joining the team. He noted AUSMAT needed a range of professionals including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, biomedical engineers and pharmacists to best meet the needs of the communities they are deployed to.

“It’s an opportunity to have a significant impact beyond the usual scope of one’s work,” he said.

Front page: Dr Tim Gray is encouraging Concord colleagues to consider joining the AUSMAT program.

Above: Tim with lab manager Dexter Takau in Port Vila during his deployment.

Dr Cameron Korb-Wells named Pride of Concord winner



Dr Cameron Korb-Wells, Medical Director of the National Centre for Veterans’ Healthcare (NCVH), has been named the winner of the 2024 Pride of Concord Medal.

Cameron said he was humbled and surprised to receive the award, designed to recognise valuable contributions, outstanding achievements, and significant service to Concord Hospital.

“To be nominated by a member of my team for this award is a humbling experience and I’m just grateful that I can continue to contribute and support the services we all deliver,” he said.

Sydney Local Health District Chief Executive Deb Willcox AM presented Cameron with the medal at a special ceremony at the Concord Medical Education Centre on Tuesday 10 December 2024.

In her speech at the ceremony, Deb said she was thrilled to learn who had been selected to receive the award.

“Congratulations Cameron, I’m so thrilled that you’re the winner this year,” she said.

“I was struck from the moment I met you by your commitment to the veterans and your drive to create a very special service for these very important members of our community.

Above: Dr Cameron Korb-Wells with his Pride of Concord Medal at the December 2024 award ceremony.

“This is just a fantastic outcome and I hope it gives you some sense of the value and recognition we place on you, so thank you and congratulations.”

I’m just grateful that I can continue to contribute and support the services we all deliver

Cameron started at Concord Hospital as an intern in 2010, before going on to become a staff specialist in 2018 and later the hospital’s Deputy Director of Medical Services.

The geriatrician was instrumental in founding the NCVH and its innovative model of care for Australian military veterans. His work has led him to be appointed a subject matter expert on government committees on veterans’ strategy and on the development of a Single Digital Patient Record.

Cameron said Concord Hospital had been “a wonderful place to learn and develop” and it was a pleasure to celebrate with peers from different disciplines whom he had worked with, been trained by and some who had been trained by him.



Message from the General Manager

Welcome to our first Concord Connection of 2025.

We have had a wonderful start to the year, not least because we have welcomed so many new starters. So far 52 medical interns and 150 new Junior Medical Officers have started at Concord Repatriation General Hospital (CRGH).



Thirty nursing graduates have started and on 17 March 2025 another 30 will join us. We have had 11 new starters across a range of allied health disciplines.

Welcome again to you all. I know you will thrive here.

Another highlight has been Concord ranking 23rd on Newsweek’s 2025 list of Australia’s best hospitals, two places better than last year’s result. This well-regarded list is based on an online survey of more than 85,000 medical experts worldwide and public data from patient surveys.

We have had plenty to celebrate in other areas. In December 2024 we awarded the Pride of Concord Medal to Dr Cameron Korb-Wells, Medical Director of the National Centre for Veterans’ Healthcare.

In January 2025, Clinical Associate Professor Thomas Gottlieb, our Head of Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology, was named an Officer of the Order of Australia in the 2025 Australia Day Honours.

I am very pleased to again celebrate the work of Associate Professor John Cullen, who has been appointed to the Aged Care Council of Elders by the federal Department of Health and Aged Care.

There is also much to look forward to, not least the reopening soon of our EM Lane Nurses Museum in its new premises next to The Green

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding service of Dr Norman Janu, who is stepping down after 15 years as Chair of the Division of Surgery. Thank you so much for your dedication, Norman.

Anthony Dombkins
Acting General Manager

Concord compliments



Family's gratitude for Burns Unit

When Tahlia Griffiths suffered a burn on a hiking camp in late 2024, two things quickly came to mind – would it affect her ability to compete in her beloved gymnastics and would she still be able to attend her school formal.

The teenager was on an extended Duke of Edinburgh Award hike near the Victorian border when a pot of two-minute noodles she was cooking tipped onto her left leg.



Her grateful parents, Gary and Kylie, say the first-class treatment she received at the Concord Burns Unit meant she was able to attend the formal just days after her initial treatment at Concord and she is now preparing for state gymnastic trials in a couple of months.

Kylie said the professionalism of the Burns Unit staff was amazing but the family was most affected by the team's compassion.

"I think the biggest thing for me is they genuinely cared," she said.

Gary said: "The whole crew there showed, empathy towards Tahlia, treated Tahlia as an individual, not as a number, not as just a patient."

The couple said the Burns Unit team listened to Tahlia's concerns about gymnastics and attending her formal and offered solutions to ensure her recovery took them into account.

The physiotherapist who spoke to the family gave Tahlia exercises to ensure she regained the full breadth of movement in her leg, while occupational therapists located skin-coloured bandages so she could wear her formal dress without her injury looking too obvious.

Above: The burn to Tahlia's left leg.

Right: Tahlia Griffiths at her formal after her treatment at the Concord Burns Unit.

Every single person was compassionate and very knowledgeable

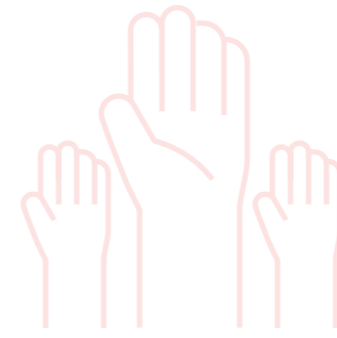
Now preparing for state trials in gymnastics, Tahlia said she felt no effect of her injuries after her treatment at Concord and follow-up appointments.

"It was great that they thought about that [healing] process and wanted to help me get back to where I was before," the 16-year-old said.

"[The injury] literally doesn't affect me at all ... there's no difference."

Gary and Kylie said they were grateful for the work of everyone on the Burns Unit team.

"Every single person was compassionate and very knowledgeable and we could not have asked for a better experience," they said.



Learning groups to help leaders

Managers and supervisors are encouraged to participate in Action Learning Groups at Sydney Education.

Using facilitated reflection and action-focused sessions, Action Learning Groups offer a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to addressing and resolving recurring work-based challenges.

If you join one of the groups, you will meet once a month with seven other managers from across the District.

In each 90-minute virtual session you will each discuss challenges faced by one of your group members. Together with the Sydney Education facilitator, group members will offer perspectives on the challenge and propose ways to work through it.

At the following session, the group member will update the group on how they addressed the challenge. Then, the group will listen to another group member share their challenges.

Everyone must attend the first session, and the group will meet for eight months. Each participant will need to attend a minimum of seven of the eight sessions as a prerequisite for enrolling.

The Action Learning Groups allow participants to:

- apply critical and creative thinking
- analyse managerial challenges and brainstorm innovative solutions
- collaborate with group members to identify root causes of challenges
- apply new knowledge and skills to address workplace challenges
- practice active listening, effective questioning and empathy in a group setting
- understand the shared challenges all managers encounter across interdisciplinary groups

Managers wishing to join an Action Learning Group should visit this website to express their interest: <https://slhd.health.nsw.gov.au/sydney-education/courses-programs/action-learning-groups>



Get ready to Step Up for Cancer Survivorship

Registrations have opened for the 2025 Step Up challenge, with members of the Concord Hospital community urged to participate and help improve the lives of cancer survivors.



The challenge will again be held in June and participants can nominate their favoured activity and seek sponsorship to raise money for the Sydney Cancer Survivorship Centre. This year the challenge aims to raise \$100,000.

It can be as simple as a daily walk, or you can add a swim or a run –any activity counts. All funds go towards free exercise sessions and courses at the Concord Cancer Survivorship Centre to improve the fitness, strength and quality of life for cancer survivors.

Register for Step Up 2025 before 30 April and you will go into the draw for one of three early bird prizes of StretchLab Five Dock vouchers, valued at \$125 each. The prizes will be drawn on 5 May and winners will be notified by phone.

Register as an individual or form a team.

stepupforcancersurvivorship.org.au



Australia Day honour for Clinical Associate Professor Tom Gottlieb



Clinical Associate Professor Thomas Gottlieb, Concord Hospital's Head of Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology, has been appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in the 2025 Australia Day Honours.

It was awarded for his "distinguished service to medicine as an infectious disease and microbiology specialist, author and researcher, and to professional organisations".

Sydney Local Health District Chief Executive Deb Willcox AM and Concord Hospital acting General Manager Anthony Dombkins said the Australia Day honour was worthy recognition of the profound impact of Tom's contribution to patient care and national and international health policy.

"Tom's work has been at the forefront of the fight against antimicrobial resistance and helping us refine our care for our patients," Deb said. "It's wonderful to see his dedication and expertise honoured in this way."

As a specialist, researcher and author, Tom has been heavily involved in the national and international policy response to antimicrobial resistance, identified by the

World Health Organization as one of the biggest threats to modern medicine.

He has long been involved with the Australian Group for Antimicrobial Resistance (AGAR) and the Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (ASTAG).

Tom has served on committees for the National Health and Medical Research Council and on the executives of the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases and the Australian Society for Antimicrobials. He is also a clinical senior lecturer at the University of Sydney.

In his time at Concord Hospital, Tom has held a series of key appointments since he first became a Staff Specialist in Infectious Diseases and Microbiology in 1991. He has been Head of Department of Infectious Diseases since 2000, Head of Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology since 2014 and a member of the Medical Staff Council Executive since 2000.

Police spread Christmas cheer

Burwood Police Area Command helped spread some Christmas cheer across the hospital in December 2025 with the donation of an array of gifts.

Burwood Commander Superintendent Christine McDonald visited Concord on 23 December to present acting General Manager Anthony Dombkins with the gifts.

In a Facebook post marking the donation, Burwood Police Area Command said it was hoped the gifts would bring some smiles and joy to people in hospital throughout the festive season.

"Small acts of kindness can brighten someone's day," the post read.

Right: Concord Hospital acting General Manager Anthony Dombkins accepts the donation from Superintendent Christine McDonald, of Burwood Police Area Command.



CommBank staff donation



Commonwealth Bank Managers from across Sydney's inner west visited Concord Hospital on 3 December 2024.

The managers donated more than 200 Patient Hygiene Packs for patients at Concord, presenting the packs to acting General Manager Anthony Dombkins and Community and Consumer Participation Coordinator Jo Coombes.

A Commonwealth Bank spokesperson said the idea came from a branch manager from the company's Inner West Area after the manager was a patient at the Concord Emergency Department.

"Since this was an unexpected experience, [the manager] did not have any hygiene kits prepared and found others around them to be in the same position," the spokesperson said.

"This Branch Manager thought it would be a good idea to create hygiene packs for the hospital to give out to their patients who didn't have anything to help support them while they were recovering."

The spokesperson said the bank was committed to supporting organisations who make a difference in their communities, twice-yearly running a Community Donations Program that also allows customers to have a say in selecting the winning group.

Left: Commonwealth Bank managers from the inner west visited Concord Hospital with their donation of patient hygiene packs.

Staff stars



Heads of departments appointed

Gynaecology – Dr Jessica Lowe



Jessica has worked at Concord Hospital for the past six years as a specialist gynaecologist, with a special interest in minimally invasive surgery, having completed fellowships in London and in Sydney. She has a passion for education and training, and regularly runs courses in advanced gynaecological laparoscopic skills and holds a teaching position with the University of Sydney. Jessica has an interest in global women's health, having been on mission with Médecins Sans Frontières in Afghanistan and completed a Master of Public Health, including a public health internship at the South-East Asia Regional World Health Organisation headquarters in India.

Geriatric Medicine – Associate Professor Louise Waite



Louise is a true Concordian, having trained at Concord as a medical student, JMO, basic physician trainee and advanced trainee in Geriatric Medicine.

Louise completed her PhD at Concord, identifying clinical predictors of dementia and has been a Staff Specialist Geriatrician at Concord since 2001. Louise continues to maintain an active interest in all aspects of dementia diagnosis and care, participating in the Cognitive Disorders Clinic, a multidisciplinary clinic at Concord Hospital. She established Geriatric Medicine Telehealth from Concord Hospital to rural and remote regions of NSW more than 20 years ago. Louise has been the Head of Department, Geriatric Medicine, at Concord since 2019 and participates in a number of clinical governance committees, facilitating essential monitoring and oversight of safety and governance within the hospital. She maintains an active interest in research and has published over 170 peer-reviewed papers.

Her continuing commitment as HoD is highly appreciated.

Anaesthetics – Dr Rod Martin



Rod has been a Staff Specialist Anaesthetist at Concord Hospital since 2013 and has served as a Supervisor of Training with the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) since 2014. He teaches for the ANZCA primary examination and is dedicated to mentoring registrars throughout their training, supporting them as they transition into consultant roles. In 2019, Rod earned a Master of Medicine in Clinical Epidemiology and in 2024 he became an Associate Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA) after completing the Leadership for Clinicians course. He was a member of the COVID executive group and was key to establishing and staffing the 2E COVID ICU. His clinical interests include anaesthesia for burns surgery and anaesthesia in non-theatre settings.

Various service developments are planned at Concord this year, and it's an exciting time for Rod to step into this leadership role.

Employees of the month

September

Helen Pope
Medical receptionist, ACE unit

Helen, who has recently retired, upheld all the CORE values of Sydney Local Health District. She demonstrated the utmost commitment, devotion and responsibility to her work. Helen was a team player and always collaborative, ensuring issues that arose with patients and doctors were discussed openly and honestly with the treating team.

October



Susan Li
Geriatrics registrar

Susan involves her patients and their families and carers in her decision making and listens with an open mind. She is very approachable and is supportive of her junior medical officers. She is open to feedback and holds herself accountable for her decisions. She is never rude and always thanks and appreciates others. She acts professionally and with integrity.

Team of the Quarter

ACE Unit nurses

Under the leadership of their exceptional NUM Min Zhu, the team of nurses in the Ambulatory Care and Endoscopy Unit is a collaborative, highly skilled and dedicated force of specialists that provides a very high level of service in the endoscopy unit. These nurses always show high levels of skill and compassion towards the patients. They uphold the highest standards of quality nursing care in endoscopy and deserve recognition for the consistent high-quality work over many years.



RESEARCH



Updates from travelling scholars

Concord Institute of Academic Surgery (CIAS) Co-Chair Associate Professor Sarah Aitken has told of her excitement at pursuing her research into health workforce inclusion and diversity as part of her Harkness Fellowship.

The vascular surgeon has been based at the University of California San Francisco since September as part of the fellowship.

In a message to colleagues at CIAS, Sarah said she had travelled across the United States to investigate disparities in the health system and programs designed to address them.

“With the other 11 Harkness fellows from around the world, we visited the [New York] Tenement Museum to understand more about the role of immigration policies in health disparities,” she said.

“We also had the opportunity to visit Fountain House, an innovative community-funded program, which is implementing social prescribing practices to support people with severe mental illness, and leading the way in how healthcare can move out of hospital settings and into the community.”

One highlight of her time in the US, Sarah said, had been her visit to the Texas Vascular and Endovascular Society, where she met vascular surgeons and residents, and taught in simulation sessions. She said it was great

to get to know the US medical education system from the perspectives of medical students and trainees.

Sarah said that on visit to Hawaii she had been very impressed how John A Burns School of Medicine’s medical program centred on ensuring the best health outcomes for Native Hawaiians.

Also conducting research in the US is CIAS colorectal fellow Dr Sireesha Koneru. Sireesha is undertaking a Fulbright Future Scholarship and researching functional outcomes after “watch and wait” management for rectal cancer at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

She described the scale of the renowned hospital as “awe-inspiring”, with its Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery having treated more than 22,000 patients and undertaken more than 3000 colorectal surgical procedures before the end of last year.

“The 100th year anniversary of the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery has been a great opportunity to learn how embedded the rich history of the Mayo Clinic is in the development of the specialty of colorectal surgery,” Sireesha said.

A personal highlight of her time in the US was also a visit to the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, at the invitation of Ambassador Kevin Rudd for the 75th Anniversary of the Fulbright program.

Above: Associate Professor Sarah Aitken at an event in the US.

REDEVELOPMENT

Milestone in Burudyara build



The new Burudyara forensic rehabilitation facility is rapidly taking shape with the roof now in place and work continuing on the building’s façade.

The tower crane used to build the main structure was removed in early January 2025 after a topping out ceremony was held at the site in November 2024.



Aside from its construction of the façade, main works contractor Built is now working on the installation of high-level services across the building’s five floors and the construction of internal walls and doors.

Construction of the facility began in mid-2024 and it is expected to be completed by the end of 2025.

Burudyara will provide low and medium secure mental health beds. The project is a partnership between Health Infrastructure and Sydney Local Health District.

Part of the NSW Government’s \$700 million Statewide Mental Health Infrastructure Program (SWMHIP), this investment will meet the needs and improve the capacity of NSW Health’s forensic rehabilitation system.

Forensic rehabilitation is a specialist area of the mental health system that provides assessment, care and treatment to people with mental illness who are, or have been, in contact with the criminal justice system.



Events

27 March, 1 May and 29 May

Market Day

The Green

22 April

Anzac Day commemoration

Centenary Garden

9 May, 6pm-7pm

Concordians AGM

CRGH Conference Room 1

12 May

International Nurses Day



Get in touch

We would love to hear from you. To provide feedback, suggest stories or submit a staff photo, please contact our Concord Connection working group SLHD-ConcordConnection@health.nsw.gov.au

Sydney Local Health District presents

March Arts

Celebrating the arts in healthcare
across Sydney Local Health District

What's on at Concord Hospital

Centenary Institute Exhibition
When Art Meets Science

March (all month)

Foyer, Main Building

Arterie Open Workshop
Creating Kindness

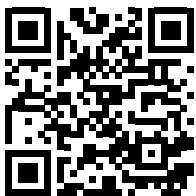
Thursday 6 March, 10am-3pm

Foyer, Main Building

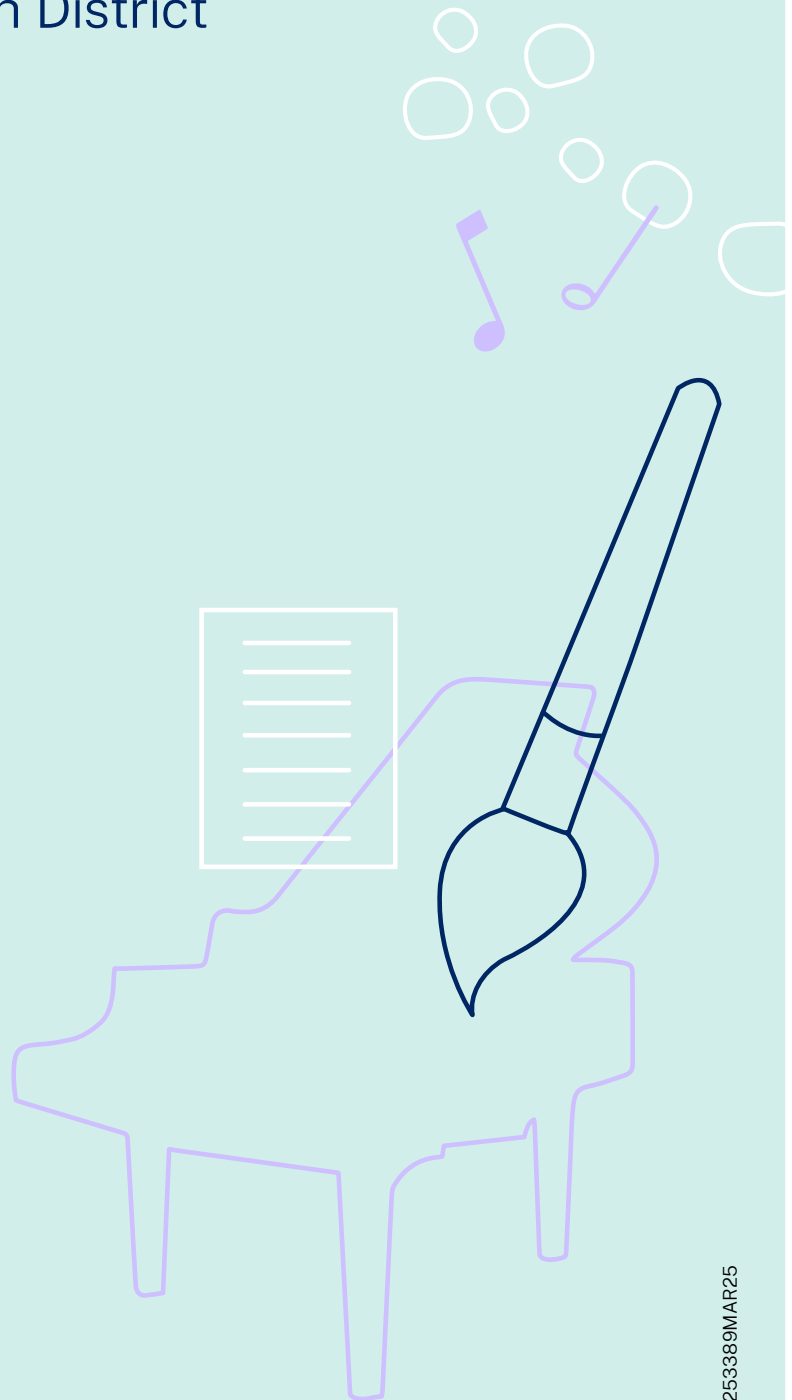
Make Music Day

Wednesday 12 March, 10am-3pm

Foyer, Main Building



For more
information
please scan
the QR code



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Sydney
Local Health District

