

Vitality

WINTER 2009

WORLD LEADING CARE AT YOUR DOORSTEP



18 year old Stephanie Dundas was admitted to ICU desperately ill and in need of a new liver. Thanks to the care and support from the ICU team and in particular to the person who donated their liver, Stephanie now has a new lease on life.



Saving lives every day

Austin Health's Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is a state-referral service for acute spinal cord injury and liver transplant patients. Patients are also admitted after having cardiac, neuro and general surgery, obstetric emergencies or general medical illnesses.

The ICU's nurse unit manager, John Rogan explained that many patients come to ICU with no confirmed diagnosis. "We stabilise, assess, diagnose and treat," said John. The ICU really is where the sickest patients are cared for and it's their last chance at survival.

"We also place great emphasis on the care of a patient's family and friends, because it is one of the most stressful times in their lives," he said.

The ICU has capacity for up to 20 patients with one-on-one nursing care around the clock. The nursing team support each other and work closely with the medical and allied health teams, including patient service assistants, chaplaincy, social work, speech therapy, physiotherapy, dieticians, and pharmacy.

Apart from immediate patient care and treatment, a large focus for the Austin Health ICU is research in local, national and international clinical trials. "We are in the top five ICUs in the world in regards to associated papers and publications on our research work," John said.

Recent research projects include: advancements in renal replacement therapy to remove toxins more effectively from patients' blood when their kidneys are not working; and sepsis (infections), which can cause major organ failure if left untreated. "We also have a large education focus, especially in post graduate nursing," John said.

Another important function of the ICU is their Medical Emergency Team (MET). The MET includes a dedicated ICU nurse and ICU registrar who receive more than 1500 calls a year from across all areas of the hospital. The MET assesses patients' early warning signs of life threatening issues and admit the highest-risk patients to the ICU.

According to John, about 20 percent of the MET calls require patients to be admitted into ICU. He said, "Through MET's early intervention, the number of cardiac arrests has been significantly reduced over the last few years."

"Austin Health ICU patients really can be confident that they will receive the best, most current care available," John said, "We are here and ready 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for when people need us most."

Moving forward

A thank you message from the CEO

Dear friends, I would like to thank you for your continued support in helping Austin Health to provide the very best of care for our patients.



Each year in public health seems more demanding than the last and every year Austin Health continues to provide the highest quality care to a growing number of Victorians. We can only do this with the passion and commitment of our dedicated staff; together with your support.

Excitingly, Austin Health has over 60 building projects either in construction or planning stages. Highlights include: a new neurosciences' building; refurbishment of our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit; advanced planning on our Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre that should start construction by end of the year; a Health and Rehabilitation Centre; advanced planning on a Centre for Trauma Related Mental Health and refurbishment of Radiology at our Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital.

These developments, along with your continued support, will help ensure that Austin Health remains a world-class leader in medical care and research.

We are at a very exciting stage in the organisation's long history and I look forward to sharing more news with you in future editions of Vitality.

Dr Brendan Murphy
Chief Executive Officer

Stephanie's Story

A recent patient who desperately needed the highest-level of care to survive was 18 year old Stephanie Dundas. Admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) twice and hospitalised for two consecutive months, Stephanie was gravely ill. The doctors needed to break the news to her parents Sue and Rob that their daughter desperately needed a new liver to survive.



Stephanie with her mum Susan at Austin Health's ICU

Stephanie's body was shutting down. She was placed on a kidney filtration machine to keep her vital organs functioning, while her parents waited by her side for a new liver.

Her mum Sue never left her side. "I have never seen care like it. So many people getting together to look after one little person. The staff were fabulous and so careful with her," Sue said.

"The ICU was so prepared for all the possible complications," she said. "Some of the nurses were like Steph's own angels."

Stephanie became the first patient in Victoria with cystic fibrosis to receive a liver transplant.

"As her parent, I would look to the ICU nurses with tears in my eyes and silently plead with them to just help make my daughter better. They really were amazing

and knew just when to step back or when to put their arm around you. I know it's expensive to keep a patient in ICU, but no matter what it costs they deserve every cent we can give them, because people's lives really are in their hands."

Stephanie is now living at home again and looking forward to eventually getting back to skiing with her brothers Chris and Nathan and riding her horse Champ.

Austin researchers in top seven

Austin Health researchers collected two of seven National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Excellence Awards last year, proving our status as one of Australia's top research precincts. The annual awards are granted to the highest-ranking grant and fellowship recipients.

Neurologist Professor Graeme Jackson, Director and founder of the Brain Research Institute (now part of the Florey Neurosciences Institutes) at our Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital was recognised for his work defining the causes of epilepsy and classifying the brain's developmental abnormalities using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Dr Sofianos Andrikopoulos, head of the Islet Biology Research Group at The University of Melbourne Department of Medicine at Austin Health, was recognised for research that suggests that a common class of drugs used to treat Type 2 Diabetes, sulfonylureas, actually accelerate the condition.

Dr Andrikopoulos said that for two Austin Health researchers to win the award was significant. "There were 4,055 applications across all the award categories and at the dinner they recognised the top seven. So we're up in the top 17 per cent of the country – and two of us are at Austin Health!"



Award-winning researchers Dr Sofianos Andrikopoulos and Professor Graeme Jackson discuss their work in the Department of Medicine laboratory at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital.



Horticulturist and acquired brain injury nurse, Steven Wells shares the garden with a patient.



Participants enjoy the freedom of diving in the pool at Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre.

Creative Therapies help to heal

Art, music and gardening are a regular and enjoyable part of the recovery process for patients at Austin Health's Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre.

"Patients get a greater sense of possibilities and are motivated because they are doing something they enjoy. They gain a sense of being productive," said Community Integration and Leisure Services manager, Sal Dema.

Mr Dema oversees the development of these services for people with acquired brain injury or spinal cord injury, amputees, and those recovering from car accidents, orthopaedic surgery, neurological conditions or chronic illness.

"These therapies help people achieve physical goals such as improving arm strength and hand function through practical tasks, painting, playing an instrument or digging," he said. "They also address psychosocial

issues helping people to express their feelings of loss and grief in non-verbal ways."

Programs include Horticultural Therapy, Music Therapy and Art Therapy. One of the most recent programs is scuba-diving and snorkelling in the centre's hydrotherapy pool, funded by North Brighton Rotary Club, to particularly assist people with a spinal cord injury.

The therapies programs are possible thanks to the ongoing support of people making donations, leaving bequests; and funds from the corporate sector and community groups.

The centre held a fundraising concert, Sunday Sounds, earlier this year to raise money and awareness of their Creative Therapies program. Thank you to all who volunteered and attended the day!

If you would like to donate or run a fundraising event for Austin Health, contact our Community Events Officer on 9496 5753.

Leaving a lasting legacy

Every year hundreds of thousands of people turn to Austin Health for vital medical care and treatment.

By leaving a legacy, through the gift of a Bequest in your Will, you will help ensure that Austin Health continues to be a world-class leader in providing medical care and research. You also will leave a lasting legacy of your kindness.

When you notify Austin Health of your intention to leave a Bequest you are welcomed as an Austin Health Ambassador.

For further information on leaving a Bequest, please call Maria Longo, Bequest Manager on 03 9496 5361.

Spinal cord injury research gets a boost



Professor Mary Galea demonstrates the ReJoyce workstation, which patients will operate using a wireless stimulator to make different grasping and releasing hand functions

The Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative awarded more than \$14 million in grants to Austin Health researchers, to improve the quality of life for people with spinal cord injuries (SCI).

Director of the Rehabilitation Sciences Research Centre at Austin Health's Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, Professor Mary Galea was awarded \$4.7 million for a five-year, four-part study to investigate exercise in people with SCI, including the potential to recover neurological function.

"The current approach is that damage to the spinal cord will never recover so you should maximise what you can do with the rest of your body," explained Professor Galea.

"People receive much better emergency and intensive care treatment these days and a lot more

people have incomplete injuries, so there is some continuity of the spinal cord," said Professor Galea.

ReJoyce, a specially designed workstation allows Professor Galea's SCI patients to operate the device using a wireless stimulator to make different grasping and releasing hand functions - and have fun at the same time.

Part of the project uses electrical stimulation on patients' muscles to drive the cycling of a bike, while in treadmill training, patients use their body to adjust when a therapist moves their legs beneath them in a walking pattern.

"The exercise will drive whatever potential the body has to repair," Professor Galea said. Her study will also look at making gyms more accessible for people with SCIs.

Professional healthcare at home

Hospital in The Home is a program that allows suitable patients to receive quality medical care in the comfort of their own home. Hospital in The Home has continued to expand since it started in 1994. The multidisciplinary program offers suitable patients the chance to choose where they would prefer to receive their planned acute treatment.

Austin Health Manager of Home and Ambulatory Services, Mrs Helen Fithall said, "There's been an increase in the amount of people who need intravenous antibiotics at home for different infections and illnesses,

including cancer patients having chemotherapy."

One of the great aspects of this program is that it offers patients the care they need while providing the opportunity to recover in the comfort and privacy of their own home.

Nurses report results to a hospital call centre and treating doctors, and work closely with emergency and infectious diseases staff. Patients have 24-hour access to Austin Health's on-call nurses who visit daily and help organise meals and home supports if required.

Meet the team



Austin Health Fundraising's team member Raff Savvas

A central part of Austin Health fundraising is to ensure that donations are banked and receipts are issued to the generous donors, like you, who give to our fundraising appeals.

Team member Raffaelina Savvas (known as Raff) has been with the fundraising department for four years now in this important role.

"I find the generosity of our donors amazing," Raff explains. "Some are pensioners who write in with their donation to say that they are sorry they cannot give more...so sweet."

Raff said that many donors have had some association with Austin Health, either they or a family member have been treated here and are extremely grateful for the care they received and now give regularly to our appeals.

Raff said, "My background was in financial services, but I enjoy this job much more because I get to speak with our generous supporters. Many are regular donors and they are so happy to help as much as they can. I am really touched by their generosity to help others."



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