



the royal victorian
eye and ear
hospital

Sight + Sound

NEWS | SPRING 2020



Peter Burns

Peter Burns “counts his blessings” for the care received at the Eye and Ear

With so much going on in our lives, sometimes we can forget to get our eyes checked. But if there is anyone that understands the importance of having your eyes checked, it's Peter Burns. Peter was living in regional Victoria and had recently left the Public Service to start a new role as a part time tour guide. After a check-up with his doctor, he was advised to go and see an optometrist. “I felt like I had a grain of sand in my right eye, there was nothing obviously wrong.” Later in the week Peter was showing tourists from the USA around the city, and as the group had some free time to explore on their own, Peter decided to go to the Emergency Department at the Eye and Ear to check his eye.

Everything seemed OK until the doctor who examined Peter noticed something concerning. “The doctor said he was sorry to tell me that I had retinal detachment in not one, but both eyes!” Peter was scheduled as a priority for eye surgery the next day. Peter was back at 7am sharp the next morning, and the operation went well. Peter was soon on his feet again and three months later his eyesight had returned to normal and he was back to work with the tour groups which saw him travel to Scotland, Eastern Europe, Iran, Iceland, Greenland, Central Asia and Tasmania. However, Peter wasn't out of the woods yet. He was told that there was a possibility he would develop cataracts. Unfortunately he did.

In 2019, Peter was referred to a cataract specialist by an optometrist. After having the operation to remove the cataract from his right eye Peter developed a bleed behind the retina, causing the complete loss of sight in his eye. Peter had to

be transferred to the Eye and Ear where he had emergency surgery to stop the bleeding and another operation to drain blood from behind the retina.

After the surgery the doctor on call held out his hand and asked Peter how many fingers he could see. “My answer was that I couldn't even see his hand, let alone his fingers, and at this stage I had almost resigned myself to being blind in the right eye.”

After a few days Peter noticed he could make out some shapes with his right eye which gave him a glimmer of hope. Upon discharge, Peter was given a range of eye drops and was asked to come back for check-ups. Peter slowly regained eyesight and after three months, he was able to legally drive again. “To go from a point where you think that you have no sight in one eye to be able to drive again and do everything as usual is fantastic.”

“I have now had three emergency operations by some of Australia's best eye surgeons who have given me back my sight. The nursing staff in the hospital are of the highest standard and looked after me in a most caring manner.”

Since the operation over a year ago Peter ceased using the eye drops and due to COVID-19 restrictions, has participated in ongoing telehealth consultations with Eye and Ear doctors. He is very pleased with the progress. “It will probably never be 100%, but I am more than happy. As my dear old Grandmother, who was almost blind, would say “*count your blessings.*”



CEO message

Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of Sight + Sound. 2020 has been an incredibly challenging year so far.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused us all

to readjust the way we live, and for many of us, assess what is important. As a hospital, I am incredibly proud of the way our staff have stepped up to all of the challenges that have been asked of them. We have seen many staff across our hospital volunteer to support the broader health sector that has been depleted of staff at various times during the pandemic. The commitment I have seen has been inspiring.

As always, patient safety is our priority and in the spirit of our culture of continuous improvement there have been many changes at the Eye and Ear, which you can read more about in the next story. I am sure you will also be interested in the story of Peter Burns and how his routine check-up uncovered a condition that required emergency surgery. Peter's story provides an important reminder of how important it is to maintain your eye health appointments and to seek treatment quickly if you have concerns. In this edition I am also pleased to share with you information about the clinics that continue to operate at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. This article outlines how our service delivery has been reviewed and amended to ensure we continue to provide the best service to our patients as safely as possible at this time.

Please take care during these difficult times and I hope that you enjoy this edition.

Brendon Gardner



Clinical concierge

COVID-19 Update

The COVID-19 State of Disaster has impacted us all. Since the start of the pandemic, we have put in place a number of measures to keep our community safe. While our overarching purpose to provide the highest level of care to our patients, visitors and staff has not changed, responding to COVID-19 has required us to work together to pivot in a way that we never have before.

Since the start of the pandemic we have had to innovate and adapt the way we operate. We are working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure we take a measured and consistent organisational response to COVID-19. Over the last several months, a number of initiatives have been introduced including telehealth appointments, increased cleaning across both sites, and a new clinical concierge procedure where all visitors and staff are screened before entering the hospital.

We are all working together to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. As an organisation we continue to support the Victorian community by providing ongoing assistance to the healthcare sector. Many of our staff have been involved at the frontline of the statewide COVID-19 response which has included: participation in the testing of residents in the Melbourne public housing towers; nursing staff deployment to support the residential aged care sector and most recently, staff redeployed across hospitals hardest hit by COVID-19 related staffing shortages. Such is the calibre of our staff, a number have been seconded to work at the Department of Health and Human Services to support the broader COVID-19 health response.

Continuing to provide the best care for Aboriginal Australian patients

Over the last few months, the Eye and Ear Mirring Ba Wurring Aboriginal Health Unit along with clinical staff have worked tirelessly to continue providing services to patients in both our Ophthalmology and Healthy Ears outreach clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mirring Ba Wurring literally means “eyes and ears” in at least 3 of the 5 languages of the Kulin Nations.

Our commitment to closing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians has led to the establishment of two clinics. The first, the Healthy Ears clinic, has been successfully operating in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) on a monthly basis for the past six years. Bookings are coordinated by Aboriginal Health Worker Katie Edney at VAHS, who makes bookings for people under 21 years of age who require ear, nose and throat (ENT) assessments. The clinic has grown since it started in 2014 and offers up to 16 ENT consultations and 12 audiology assessments every month. Both Katie and ENT Surgeon, Professor Stephen O’Leary review waiting lists and screen children to ensure those who require urgent treatment are seen without delays. The clinic is staffed by members of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons who provide clinical care as well as Eye and Ear staff.

Another clinic is the Ophthalmology clinic which started in November 2018. This clinic was the first to operate within a Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and leads the way in providing assessments and treatment. This importantly includes the provision of injecting and laser therapies in a culturally safe environment. The clinic runs fortnightly at VAHS in Fitzroy,



Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers Nat and Carleen

with ophthalmologist Dr Rosie Dawkins treating adults and Dr Susan Carden treating children. Eye and Ear Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer, Natalie Tieri works closely with Diabetes Educator, Mandy Williamson to coordinate appointments.

The pandemic poses some unique challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients. Many Elders who typically attend morning sessions have chronic health diseases and are also classified as more at risk. To mitigate some of the concerns around attending clinics, staff have adapted their way of working. Drs Dawkins and Carden have continued with clinical operations during the pandemic to ensure Aboriginal patients receive urgent treatment. Bookings are kept to a minimum which allows for quicker access and reduced waiting times for patients. The smaller clinic numbers have also allowed VAHS to maintain appropriate physical distancing. The dedication of everyone involved in providing continuity of service during these demanding times is to be commended.

A big thank you to all our generous donors

It is humbling that our loyal donors continue to show their generosity during these difficult times and for that we are so grateful. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen our hospital continually innovate and adapt to new ways of working. While Government restrictions have required us to postpone some of our less urgent surgeries and appointments, the needs of our patients are still very much at the forefront of every decision we make.

Our donors are steadfast and committed; in fact some of have been contributing since the 1980s. During the pandemic we have received both financial donations as well as gifts of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We are incredibly grateful that, even during the most difficult of times, our donors have continued to support our fundraising efforts. Your donation makes such a difference to the patients we treat, and for that we thank you.

Please look after yourselves and stay safe and well.

