

sight & sound



New treatment trial saves Herbie's sight

For 72 year old Herbie Hopton, being told he wasn't going to go blind was like winning Tattsлото.

About five years ago Herbie was diagnosed with the wet form of Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD). Wet AMD occurs when abnormal blood vessels leak into the retina causing loss of central vision.

AMD is Australia's leading cause of blindness and affects one in seven people over the age of 50.

Although there is no cure for this condition, there are treatment options that can slow down its progression. The earlier AMD is detected, the more vision you are likely to retain.

The current treatments at the time didn't work for Herbie but a trial of a new treatment at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital turned his life around.

Herbie was having problems seeing the television, reading and writing. Not willing to put it down to old age, Herbie came to the Eye and Ear.

He came to the hospital at the right time as a trial had just started of a new

treatment called Lucentis, designed to stop AMD from getting worse. Without hesitation, Herbie put his hand up for the trial knowing he may never get an opportunity like this again.

Heading the trial at the hospital was Retinal specialist Professor Robyn Guymer.

Professor Guymer said because of the Eye and Ear's reputation and large number of patients, the hospital is often asked to trial new treatments. This means patients access these treatments earlier.

"By the time the treatment would become available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2007, Herbie could have been blind."

Herbie said he jumped at the chance to take part in the trial before Professor Guymer even had a chance to explain what would be involved.

"I soon found out that I would have to have a needle in my eye but this didn't bother me – I was going to go blind without it."

Without this trial the AMD could have spread to both eyes, potentially leaving Herbie legally blind. However, he has almost 100 percent vision in his right eye and only a slight blur in the central vision in his left eye.

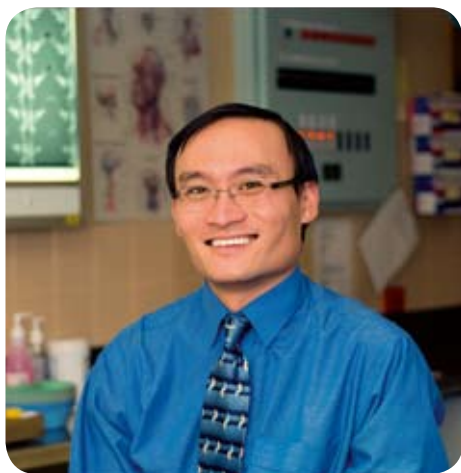
"I'm as happy as a pig in mud – I still drive, go fishing, tinker in the shed and most importantly of all, see my grandkids."



Top A trial for a new treatment for AMD saved Herbie Hopton's sight.

Bottom Retinal specialist Professor Robyn Guymer headed the Lucentis trial at the Eye and Ear.

Below Dr Benjamin Wei knew from a young age he wanted to become an ENT surgeon.



Researcher of today, surgeon of the future

Dr Benjamin Wei's attraction to becoming an ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeon was personal. His father had chronic ear disease for most of his life. From a young age he decided it was the career for him.

Dr Wei started as an ENT registrar at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital this year.

He said he wanted to work at the Eye and Ear because of the strengths in ear surgery and cochlear implant operations and the research partnerships with both the Department of Otolaryngology University of Melbourne and the Bionic Ear Institute.

"I enjoy the research because the outcomes can benefit so many people but I also enjoy making a positive difference in people's life one on one in the hospital as a clinician."

Although still in training to be a surgeon, Dr Wei's research has already been recognised around the world.

Dr Wei uncovered the causes of pneumococcal meningitis in cochlear implant recipients and showed how the risks might be reduced. He was the first Australian to receive the Association for Research in Otolaryngology/American Academy of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery Residents Research Prize.

In 2008 he became the first surgeon scientist to receive the Premier's Award for Health and Medical Research.

Below Dr Liz Hallam is the Eye and Ear's new Chief Medical Officer.



Delivering the best possible care in the best possible way

Dr Liz Hallam has recently joined the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital as the Chief Medical Officer and Executive Director of Medical Services. Dr Liz Hallam has one thing on her mind – making sure the hospital delivers excellent care to all patients in the best possible way.

As Chief Medical Officer, Dr Hallam oversees medical staff, research, training and patient safety. It's a big task with many challenges, but one that Dr Hallam has taken on with a passion.

Dr Hallam knows how hospitals work from hands on experience. She has spent over 25 years as a paediatrician and Medical co-director of Women's and Children's services at Royal Hobart Hospital where she led change in modernising paediatric medicine.

Dr Hallam said after many years of being on call it was time for a change.

"I have a strong interest in clinical governance and in maintaining and improving quality patient care and this will be my focus at the Eye and Ear."

Below Le Canterine Del Fogolar entertained the audience at Cultural Diversity Week celebrations.



Eye and Ear in harmony

It was standing room only when the Italian Women's Choir, Le Canterine Del Fogolar, serenaded patients at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital for Cultural Diversity Week.

Patients from the hospital's seven largest cultural groups were invited to an afternoon tea at the hospital where they met with members of cultural community groups, Board members and hospital staff.

Guests also included the Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, George Lekakis and Aboriginal elder from the Wurundjuri people, Aunty Dianne.

The choir sang the popular Neapolitan/Italian song 'Santa Lucia' or Saint Lucy who is known as the saint and protector of eyes and sight.

Chief Executive Officer of the Eye and Ear, Ann Clark said the afternoon tea was a chance to celebrate the hospital's patient diversity.

"This was a wonderful opportunity to share and link groups together."

The afternoon tea was an initiative of the Cultural Diversity Committee and was held on 24 March to mark Harmony Day and Cultural Diversity Week.



Far Left The Ethnic Chinese Happy Age Association presents their donation to CEO Ann Clark.

Left Peter Howson – from the family photo collection.

Hospital welcomes support from Chinese Community

The Eye and Ear has gratefully received a donation of \$2,800 from the Ethnic Chinese Happy Age Association.

The association has been a long time supporter of the hospital and has now donated over \$17,800 to help fund the improvement of Victoria's eye and ear health services.

The cheque was presented to Chief Executive Officer Ann Clark by the President of the Association, Mr Sum Luong at a morning tea to honour the occasion.

Marketing and Community Relations Manager Lyn Moorfoot said the donation will be used to increase access to interpreter support for patients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

"The hospital greatly appreciates the support of the association and other community organisations throughout Victoria. It is important members of the community are aware of the hospital's services and value specialist eye and ENT care."

Remembering Peter Howson

The man behind rebuilding the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital to the world leading institution it is today, died earlier this year.

The Honourable Peter Howson CMG served for more than 30 years on the Board of the Eye and Ear working tirelessly to rejuvenate the hospital to achieve his vision of an institution concerned with the senses and to create a facility to integrate research, teaching and clinical care.

Peter grew up in London and after completing his first year exams at Cambridge University, joined the Royal Air Force.

In 1942 he was shot down over Malta and spent several hours in the Mediterranean Sea before being rescued. Injuries from his war effort meant he carried pieces of shrapnel in his arm and jaw for the rest of his life.

After the war, Peter left England for Melbourne to join the family company, Foy and Gibson, a chain of retail stores.

Peter was interested in politics and in 1955 he was elected as the Federal Liberal Member for Fawkner on his third attempt – a far cry from the packing department of his family's retail stores.

Peter paved the way in a number of key portfolios. He was Australia's first federal environment minister and first minister for Aboriginal affairs.

He lost his seat in 1972 and turned his energies to helping the deaf both

through the Eye and Ear and chairing the Deaf Foundation and the Maud Gibson Trust. Funds from this trust were used to help set up the William Gibson Chair of Otolaryngology with the hospital and the University of Melbourne.

The first recipient of the chair was the bionic ear inventor, Professor Graeme Clark. It was an honour that Peter was able to see the appointment of Professor Stephen O'Leary as the new chair last year and to celebrate the 30th birthday of the cochlear implant in 2008.

Peter died just a few months shy of his 90th birthday.

The wonders of children's hearing – see how your donation is working

Learn more about what goes on behind the scenes and how research at the Eye and Ear is improving children's hearing.

Our next morning tea for donors and supporters features the work of Associate Professor Gary Rance who is the Wagstaff Fellow in Otolaryngology with the Eye and Ear and the University of Melbourne.

10 am Thursday, 11 June 2009
Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital
426 Albert Street, East Melbourne.

Please RSVP early by emailing rsvp@eyeandear.org.au or phone 03 9929 8532



Healthy eating for your eyes

Everyone has heard the tale that eating lots of carrots will help you see in the dark.

This isn't entirely true but there is a good reason why eating carrots and other colourful fruit and vegetables are good for your eyes.

They are full of antioxidants and it is the antioxidants which keep your eyes healthy.

Antioxidants are a group of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes that help protect the body from forming free radicals. Free radicals are atoms or groups of atoms that can damage the cells, impairing the immune system and leading to infections.

Antioxidants include vitamins A, C and E, carotenoids such as beta-carotene, some minerals, phenolic compounds and other naturally occurring chemicals with antioxidant properties.

They can be found in abundance in fruit and vegies like spinach, carrots, broccoli, peas, oranges, grapes and mango.

The CSIRO recommends five to seven serves of fruit and vegies a day in order to reach your antioxidant needs.

Another food to eat to help keep your eyes healthy is fish.

Fish is low in fat, high in protein and an excellent source of omega 3 fatty

acids. Researchers worldwide have discovered that eating fish regularly – one or two serves weekly – may reduce the risk of diseases ranging from childhood asthma to prostate cancer.

Research has shown you may have to actually eat fish to get the full benefits, not just take fish oil.

Healthy ways to enjoy fish include baked, poached, grilled or steamed.

One of the key messages for anyone wanting to help protect their eyes through a lifestyle change is to stop smoking.

Smoking affects the blood vessels that supply blood to our organs. There are lots of fine blood vessels in the eye and narrowing or blockage of these blood vessels in the eye can lead to the formation of cataracts and degeneration of the macula as we age.

The macula is the small, sensitive area of the central retina which provides vision for fine work and reading.

Smoking reduces appetite too and people who smoke can have poor diets as a result.

The most important messages are there is no one super food for your eyes. Eat a balanced diet including fish and lots of colourful fruit and vegies and everything in moderation.

Support eye and ear health

Your donation to the Eye and Ear helps us fight vision and hearing loss.

By 2024, the rate of eye disease will have doubled and it is projected that one in four people will suffer hearing loss by 2050.

Donations and bequests help us to continue ground-breaking research. We share our knowledge world-wide, to make innovative eye and ear treatments available across the whole community.

You can donate at www.eyear.org.au or phone 1800 808 137



The Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital
caring in every sense

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This newsletter contains general information only and you should seek independent medical advice before relying on this information.

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