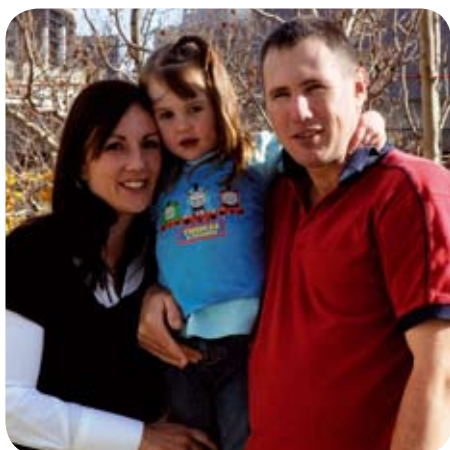


sight & sound

Landmark operation brings hope



A New Zealand toddler has become the first child in the Southern Hemisphere to undergo groundbreaking treatment for deafness, thanks to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

In May, Eye and Ear surgeon Mr Rob Briggs led the surgical team which implanted three-year-old Jorja Steele with an 'auditory brain stem implant'. The auditory brain stem implant is based on the concept of a cochlear implant, but directly stimulates the hearing nerve on the brain stem.

While this rare operation has been successfully performed at the Eye and Ear on around 12 adults this is the first time a child has undergone this procedure outside of Europe.

Mr Briggs said it was still too early to say whether the implant had resulted in any hearing for Jorja, but the device did appear to be working well during her recent clinic appointments at the Eye and Ear.

"Jorja is at the start of a long journey," Mr Briggs said. "The challenge now is to teach her how to recognise sounds created by the implant."

"She will never regain full hearing but, based on our experience and research with adults, we hope that children like Jorja will achieve even better outcomes using the implant."

Jorja tragically lost her hearing a week before her 1st birthday, as a result of meningitis. She was unable to achieve hearing through a bilateral cochlear implant because the meningitis caused extensive inner ear damage.

Jorja's mum, Megan Steele, said she and her husband were glad they made the decision to bring Jorja to the Eye and Ear for treatment.

"Jorja's such a happy, intelligent little girl and we love her, regardless of whether she can hear or not," Mrs Steele said. "We just want the best for her so if she could hear, even a little bit, that will help her learn how to speak and give her more opportunities and independence."

Jorja's surgery was a collaborative undertaking by three Melbourne hospitals – the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, the Royal Children's Hospital and the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Her long term care will be managed by audiologists in New Zealand.

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Top Megan and Jack Steele believe they have given Jorja the best chance for hearing and speech through the implant.

Bottom Eye and Ear surgeon Rob Briggs performed the landmark operation on Jorja.

Far Right Dr Bryony Coleman's world-first research was recognised in the 2007 Victoria Fellowship program.

Right Dr Mervyn Ferdinands is training to be one of our future ophthalmologists.



Surgeon of the future

The Eye and Ear provides a quality specialist workforce and trains all of Victoria's ophthalmologists. In this edition of Sight & Sound we profile Dr Mervyn Ferdinands, a hospital registrar in his first year of the ophthalmology training program.

What attracted you to specialising in ophthalmology?

I graduated from Melbourne University in medicine before training at Royal Melbourne Hospital in a variety of rotations, including Neurology, Plastic Surgery and Ophthalmology. Next I started working at the Eye and Ear and it was during this time I developed a real attraction to the speciality and decided to apply for the training program. I particularly enjoy the vocation's mixed medical and surgical components, the diversity of disease that can present with ophthalmic symptoms and, most importantly, the satisfaction that comes with having a large number of patients with good outcomes.

How does the Eye and Ear registrar program compare to others around Australia?

The quality of training at the Eye and Ear is first rate. Every day there is an education session or presentation during which the specialists give up their time to teach the registrars.

How competitive is it to get into the program?

Like most other specialised medical programs, the Ophthalmology

program is highly competitive. Potential candidates must sit a behavioural psychometric test, pass Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) requirements, have broad general training and demonstrate high academic standards. Generally there are 70–80 applicants annually for only 6–7 training places.

How long does one train to be an ophthalmologist?

The training program is five to six years. The first two are basic training, the next two are advanced training years and years five and six are often spent doing a fellowship in a subspecialty, such as Ocular Genetics (rare genetic eye diseases).

What have you enjoyed most about your training to date?

I enjoy the camaraderie and support amongst the registrars at the hospital.

What are your plans for the future?

My first priority is to enjoy my training. I would like to undertake at least two years of fellowship training overseas, taking my wife with me for what I hope to be an exciting experience.

The Eye and Ear trains ophthalmology registrars in conjunction with the University of Melbourne and Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists. There are currently 27 registrars being trained at the Eye and Ear.

Research honours

The Eye and Ear Hospital's Wagstaff Fellow in Otolaryngology, Dr Bryony Coleman, has been awarded a prestigious Victoria Fellowship.

The Victoria Fellowships were established by the Victorian Government to recognise young researchers with leadership potential and to enhance their future careers, while developing new ideas which could offer commercial benefit to Victoria.

Dr Coleman, who is conducting world-first research into the use of stem cells to enhance the hearing outcomes of patients with cochlear implants, was one of six Fellowship winners.

"This Fellowship is a great boost to my research, which has the capacity to help 120,000 people world-wide using cochlear implants," Dr Coleman said.

Dr Coleman will use the \$18,000 Fellowship to travel to the United States where she will work in laboratories, including those at Harvard University, to learn a specialised imaging technique. Using this technique Dr Coleman will be able to investigate further the potential of stem cells to generate new hearing nerve cells for cochlear implant patients.

Dr Coleman received the award from the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC, at a gala function at Government House.



Far Left Dr Grogan signing the hospital's cochlear implant partnership agreement with Royal Children's Hospital CEO Dr Tony Cull.

Left Eye and Ear researcher Brooke Paisley invites people with tinnitus to take part in a new hospital study.

Hospital farewell

The Eye and Ear recently farewelled its Chief Medical Officer Dr Robert Grogan.

For over six years Dr Grogan provided medical, teaching and training and research leadership in his role as Chief Medical Officer at the hospital.

Dr Rick Stawell, who spoke at Dr Grogan's farewell dinner with the Board of Directors and hospital medical staff, thanked Dr Grogan for his contribution to the Eye and Ear.

"Dr Grogan was particularly committed to ensuring our trainee surgeons received an excellent education at the hospital," Dr Stawell said.

"He was held in high regard by all of the registrars who trained at the Eye and Ear and his wisdom and experience will be missed."

Prior to the Eye and Ear Dr Grogan worked for a range of specialist hospitals, including Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute. He was also a GP for over 30 years and the club doctor for the South Melbourne Football Club.

Since departing the hospital Dr Grogan has embarked on a hiking tour of Switzerland with his wife Sue.

Study to help Tinnitus patients

The hospital invites Tinnitus sufferers to participate in a study that aims to improve the quality of life of people living with the condition.

Tinnitus is a condition where people experience noises or ringing in the ears or head, when no such external physical noise is present. It is usually caused by a change in the hearing system.

Hospital researcher Brooke Paisley said tinnitus can interfere with a person's ability to sleep or enjoy quiet activities.

"There is evidence to suggest, however, that through sharing information and experiences with fellow sufferers, people living with tinnitus can improve their quality of life," Ms Paisley said.

The hospital's study involves holding information sessions for sufferers once a month where people with tinnitus can meet and discuss what helps them to reduce the impact of the condition.

To participate in this research please have your GP refer you for a hearing test at either the Audiology Department at the Eye and Ear, or the University of Melbourne's School of Audiology, which is affiliated with the hospital. This hearing test will determine your eligibility to take part in the study.

For more information about the information sessions contact (03) 9929 8270.

For tinnitus support, you can also contact the Tinnitus Association of Victoria on (03) 9770 6075.

Upcoming events

You are invited to attend these upcoming hospital events:

Grand Round lecture

Dr Joe Reich, ophthalmologist and artist

Date Monday 3 December

Time 6 pm

Venue Victorian Artists Society, 430 Albert St, East Melbourne

RSVP Ph: (03) 9929 8562 or email sonia.aplin@eyeandear.org.au

Cost Complimentary

2007 Annual General Meeting

Date Friday, 30 November

Time 11 am

Please see the hospital's website for more details www.eyeandear.org.au

Below For more information about World Sight Day (October 11) and kids' eye health visit www.vision2020australia.org.au

Right Jorja, 3, received an auditory brain stem implant thanks to the work of Eye and Ear doctors.



Health round up

Keeping kids' eyes healthy

World Sight Day (October 11) is an annual event to promote awareness about the prevention and treatment of eye disease. This year's World Sight Day theme is children's eye health. Parents are encouraged to have their child's eyes tested regularly, particularly if there is a history of eye disease in the family or if there is a change in their child's vision. To seek advice about children's eye health, consult a GP, optometrist or ophthalmologist.

World Sight Day is the initiative of Vision 2020, a joint undertaking of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Vision 2020 is committed to the elimination of preventable blindness and vision impairment and the Eye and Ear is a proud partner of Vision 2020 Australia.

Macular Degeneration treatment on PBS

Lucentis, a new treatment for the 'wet' form of Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is now available under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Lucentis has been clinically proven, through research carried out at our hospital by our research partner, Centre for Eye Research Australia, to improve the vision of patients with 'wet' AMD.

AMD is the leading cause of blindness in Australia and comes in two forms – 'wet' and 'dry'. The 'wet' form, which is less common, occurs when abnormal blood vessels leak into the retina (located at the back of the eye). Prior to being PBS approved, Lucentis cost \$2,000 per treatment. Now, patients with 'wet' AMD can access it for as little as \$4.90 a treatment.

Patients with 'wet' AMD who want to access this treatment are advised to see their GP for a referral to an eye specialist.

Like to help the Eye and Ear?

As a public hospital, the Eye and Ear appreciates the support of the community to maintain a high standard of patient care, such as through the provision of specialist equipment and the teaching and training of expert surgeons. Donations are welcome and are tax deductible. You can make a donation to the hospital by phoning 1800 808 137.

You may also like to consider leaving a gift in your will to support the work of the hospital into the future. To make a confidential enquiry about leaving a bequest contact the Bequest Manager, on (03) 9929 8058.

Front Cover cont.

Unlike a cochlear implant, which stimulates nerves in the inner ear, Jorja's auditory brain stem implant stimulates the hearing nerve where it enters the brain. It involves:

- A sound processor on the outer ear capturing sounds, converting it to digital code and transmitting it to a decoding chip under the skin behind the ear
- The chip converts the coded sound to electrical signals, sending them to the implant, located on the brain stem
- The implant stimulating the auditory nerve, producing responses that can be interpreted by the brain as sound.

Sight & Sound is produced by the Marketing & Communications Department The Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital 32 Gisborne Street East Melbourne Victoria 3002

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

Editor Sonia Aplin
Phone (03) 9929 8689
Web www.eyearandear.org.au
Email info@eyearandear.org.au

Design www.ektavo.com.au
Photos The Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital

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