

sight & sound



Positive early results for Keratoconus treatment trial

There's nothing 30 year old Ainslie Fitzsimons enjoys more than watching a game of basketball. She's a mad basketball fan and has been a member of the Melbourne Tigers for 14 seasons. This year, as her team takes the court, she'll be able to see the game better than ever.

Ainslie is a participant in a ground breaking trial at the Eye and Ear for keratoconus. Keratoconus is an eye condition whereby a thinning of the cornea results in a cone like shape and significant visual impairment. So far, this new medical treatment has had early positive results.

For people with keratoconus, the only treatments currently available to correct their vision are contact lenses, glasses or in the most severe cases, corneal transplantation. For Ainslie, contact lenses had been sufficient to help her vision up until recently when her condition started deteriorating even more. Her optometrists knew about the trial currently underway here at the Eye and Ear so referred her for assessment.

The new procedure the Eye and Ear is trialling involves applying Riboflavin (Vitamin B2) to the eye before exposing

it to a measured dose of UVA light. This generates a chemical reaction which results in the strengthening of the cornea.

In 2006 the Eye and Ear was the only site in Australia to commence the Corneal Cross Linking Trial which is being co-ordinated by one of our research fellows and PHD student, Dr Christine Wittig. Dr Wittig was invited to Melbourne from Germany where the technique had been developed, to conduct the trial in Australia. She works in conjunction with one of our principal eye specialists, Associate Professor Grant Snibson who is overseeing this research.

Ainslie has now had both eyes treated using this technique and is amazed at the results.

"I was really worried about how my work would be affected by the condition. I am a nurse and each day I have to read important patient information and medication charts."

"I went into this trial just hoping it would stop my condition from progressing, but my eyesight has actually improved."

Associate Professor Grant Snibson said the benefit of this procedure is that patients can be treated within an hour and only need a short recovery period.

"Another benefit is the equipment can be easily transported and the treatment can be readily performed in rural areas and developing countries."

The results of the trial will soon be independently reviewed and it is hoped that this treatment will soon be more widely available to people with keratoconus.



Top After being involved in the Keratoconus treatment trial, Ainslie Fitzsimons is able to do the things she enjoys most like reading and craft.

Bottom Associate Professor Grant Snibson and his team have done over 80 treatments for patients in the trial so far.



Below Jan Boxall (left) and Ann Clark (right) will lead the hospital as we work towards redevelopment.



Built on Care and Philanthropy

This year marks 145 years of the Eye and Ear proudly restoring sight and hearing for the people of Victoria. As we mark this anniversary we are also planning for redevelopment that will allow us to continue to provide world class care for another 145 years.

Following the allocation of \$2 million in the 2007/2008 Victorian State Government budget, we will now be able to start this process.

Today the Eye and Ear is at the forefront of new technologies to improve the hearing and vision for all Victorians such as the world's first bionic eye, and regrowing damaged parts of the inner ear.

As the hospital started out, Melbourne had just been hit by a wave of migration and a construction boom. With the overcrowding, amid the dust, dirt and countless mining and construction accidents, eye and ear injuries and diseases were all too prevalent.

Andrew Sexton Gray, an accomplished surgeon from Dublin responded to this explosion in eye disease and opened an Eye and Ear Infirmary as a charitable enterprise for all those in need in Melbourne and soon businesses were offering philanthropic support.

Gray was soon joined by T. Aubrey Bowen to serve the needs of the fast growing Melbourne community. Starting out from tiny rented premises in East Melbourne, Gray and Bowen were to become the pioneers of ophthalmology in Australia.

Introducing our new Chair

In June this year the Victorian Health Minister, Daniel Andrews announced Jan Boxall as the new Chair of the Board of Directors.

Ms Boxall's background is in law having been a partner at the national law firm, Corrs Chambers Westgarth where she advised clients in a number of sectors including property and infrastructure, health, statutory corporations and government. She is now an independent legal consultant.

Ms Boxall is also a member of the Board of Directors of City West Water, Queen Victoria Market and the Melbourne Wholesale Fish Market. She is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and is the immediate past Chair of the Board of the Cabrini Hospital Group.

Ms Boxall's appointment started on the 1st of July and her term will run for three years.

Introducing our new CEO

In June 2008 the appointment of Ann Clark as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Eye and Ear was announced.

Ms Clark joins the Eye and Ear from the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) where she was Executive Director of Corporate Services.

Through this role, Ms Clark provided leadership in the complex process in planning for the redevelopment of the new RCH facilities at Parkville.

She was at the forefront of enhancing relationships with research and teaching partners and integrating clinical and non clinical aspects of the hospital and provided leadership in negotiations with the Department of Human Services during the redevelopment process.

Ms Clark takes over from the previous CEO Graeme Houghton when his term expired. Ms Clark started in her role in August 2008.



Far Left Nadine, Sam and Kate Greatorex have all had their lives changed because of the cochlear implant. *The Herald and Weekly Times Photographic Collection*

Left Professor Stephen O'Leary gave his first public lecture as the William Gibson Chair of Otolaryngology titled 'Beyond the cochlea'.

30 years of bringing sounds to silence

The first of August this year marked 30 years since the first cochlear implant operation in the world took place here at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

It was a momentous day for the creator Professor Graeme Clark who had been told he was mad thinking he could make a deaf person hear again, but that first operation on patient Rod Saunders was a success and since then over 120,000 people have benefited from the technology worldwide.

Thirty years on and one family has a particularly special relationship with the hospital and the cochlear implant.

All three children in the Greatorex family were born profoundly deaf due to a flawed gene, but with their cochlear implants and regular visits to the Eye and Ear's Cochlear Implant Clinic, Sam, 9, Kate, 6, and Nadine, 2 have had the same opportunities as other children their age.

Nadine has had implants on both ears since she was 13 months and now research from the Eye and Ear and the University of Melbourne shows two implants are better than one. The earlier the child receives them, the greater chance they have of normal language and communication development.

The Cochlear Implant Clinic was established here at the hospital in 1985, the first public clinic of its kind in the world and since then the team of surgeons, audiologists and speech pathologists have restored hearing to over 1300 adults and children.

Beyond the Bionic Ear

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital led the way with the creation of the cochlear implant and now researchers are looking beyond this device to restore and create hearing.

Senior surgeon at the Eye and Ear, Professor Stephen O'Leary outlined the future for treating hearing impairment in his first public lecture as the William Gibson Chair of Otolaryngology on 30 June.

The William Gibson Chair of Otolaryngology is a joint appointment with the hospital and the University of Melbourne and is named in memory of the Melbourne department store entrepreneur.

In his lecture Professor O'Leary outlined how researchers are working on ways to improve hearing for cochlear implant patients and in doing so are developing ways to preserve hearing through administering drugs to the inner ear in other situations where it might be damaged.

People who receive cochlear implants lose nearly all hearing in the inner ear during the operation. Research is underway into how this can be prevented so recipients could keep their natural hearing as well as use the implant, thus providing a better quality of sound.

In the visionary lecture Professor O'Leary said work is underway to replace the natural function of a damaged inner ear through

the use of stem cells to regenerate the auditory nerve thus improving the quality of hearing for cochlear implant patients.

"We are now also combining hearing aids with cochlear implants. We have become particularly interested in having a cochlear implant in one ear and hearing aids in both ears. When we have done this, we find that people hear much better in the presence of background noise."

The lecture was attended by the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser and Mrs Jan de Kretser who is the patron of the Eye and Ear.

A gift that keeps giving

We are proud to be Australia's top eye and ear health service and look forward to continuing our care to those in need.

One way to help the Eye and Ear is through a gift in your Will.

To find out more about giving a gift that continues to help beyond your lifetime phone **(03) 9929 8058**

Left For more information about World Sight Day, visit www.vision2020australia.org.au



World Sight Day

October 9 marks World Sight Day, a day held across the globe which draws attention to eye health and vision care.

The theme for this year is 'Eyes on the future – vision and ageing' focusing on the impact of vision loss and blindness for people aged 40 and over.

More than 500,000 Australians aged over 40 are vision impaired and as the population ages, this is only set to increase.

The major causes of vision impairment for older Australians are macular degeneration, glaucoma and cataract. Together with diabetic retinopathy and uncorrected refractive error, they contribute to more than 90 per cent of vision impairment in people aged over 40.

The good news is vision loss from these conditions can be prevented with early detection. A simple regular eye test and taking care of your eye health can prevent permanent vision loss.

Although age does not cause vision loss, there is a direct link between ageing and vision impairment and one of the key aims of this year's World Sight Day is to encourage people who are 40 or older to be vigilant with any changes to their vision and see their eye health professional as early as possible if they do notice any changes.

Early intervention also enables people with low vision to maintain their independence. There are low vision services available to those who need it enabling them to lead a full and active

life. These services can be accessed through referral from your eye care provider to the Eye and Ear or through organisations like Vision Australia.

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is a proud member of Vision 2020 Australia and partners with them in World Sight Day to draw attention to eye health and vision care. Vision 2020 Australia brings together over 50 organisations and is a joint initiative of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness.

Coming up ...

Did you know our library houses one of the best collections of ophthalmology resources? Learn about these resources and more on the first of our donor 'come and see' tours and morning tea.

When: 10 am Wednesday, 29 October 2008

Donors and supporters are invited to learn about our groundbreaking surgeries and 'Treasures from the Collection'.

This is our way of saying thank you for the community's ongoing support and so you can see the difference a gift to the hospital can make.

Please register your interest by calling **(03) 9929 8532**

Caring for people with Diabetes

The Eye and Ear's research partner, the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) was recently awarded a three year, Australian Research Council linkage grant.

The grant will fund a project led by CERA in which the Eye and Ear and Diabetes Australia will partner, investigating ways to overcome barriers to optimal care for diabetic retinopathy.

The hospital has been successful in gaining a \$50,000 grant from the John and Thirza Daley Charitable Trust administered by Perpetual.

This grant will fund a health education and follow up program for patients with diabetic eye conditions.



The Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital
caring in every sense

Sight & Sound is published by The Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital
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East Melbourne Victoria 3002

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

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