

# Media Release

## The Eye and Ear brings balance back to patients' lives

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14 October 2014

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (Eye and Ear) today launched the Gandel Philanthropy Balance Disorders Diagnostics - an area dedicated to a new balance disorder diagnostic and management system, obtained thanks to generous funding from a Gandel Philanthropy Community Build grant.

The state-of-the-art \$225,000 Epley Omniax System, one of only 34 in the world and only the second in Australia, increases diagnostic accuracy for sufferers of balance disorders, meaning shorter hospital stays and a rapid return to daily activities and productivity for the patient.

Dr David Szmulewicz, Head of the Balance Disorders and Ataxia Services at the Eye and Ear says patients experiencing Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV) the most common cause of vertigo, will have an improved quality of life thanks to the new system.

"Balance disorders are debilitating conditions that severely impact the sufferer's quality of life. They are also widespread, with 40 per cent of patients over 40 and more than two-thirds of people over 60 years of age experiencing some form of dizziness or loss of balance," Dr Szmulewicz says.

"Patients with unrecognised BPPV may have sustained a fall in the previous three months and are often unable to do simple daily activities that define our independence. This is why many sufferers may also experience depression.

"This system is an opportunity for faster diagnosis of BPPV, and it will also significantly improve treatment options available for patients, who are often forced to live with chronic untreated dizziness."

Gandel Philanthropy Chief Executive Officer, Vedran Drakulic says the introduction of this equipment to Victoria was an important consideration for the Trustees.

"Being only the second machine in Australia and meaning Victorians will no longer have to travel interstate to access this equipment was one of the key reasons we were keen to fund this system," Mr Drakulic says.

"We are very excited to be involved in such cutting-edge technology that will enhance future research projects."

Sixty-eight year-old Lorraine Lack was diagnosed with BPPV earlier this year. Mrs Lack also suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, and this excluded her from undergoing traditional treatments.

"Mrs Lack was one of the first patients to benefit from the new machine. Her on-going unsteadiness and dizziness were hindering her daily activities," Dr Szmulewicz says.

“Mrs Lack was suitable for the new machine, because other methods of treatment had failed in the past and were also inappropriate due to her rheumatoid arthritis.”

After three treatments, Lorraine is relieved and thankful that she no longer experiences dizziness.

“It was a weird feeling being in the machine. After some movements I would experience vertigo, then David would bring me back up-right and it would go back to normal,” Mrs Lack says.

Dr Szmulewicz says successful stories, like Lorraine’s, are thanks to the generosity of Gandel Philanthropy.

“The system will allow us to explore new treatment techniques and ensure we are at the forefront of balance disorder research and diagnosis,” Dr Szmulewicz says.

“There are also many exciting research opportunities that will help us to inform the scientific community globally about how we deal with this debilitating condition in the future.”

The Eye and Ear Emergency Department treats around 2000 patients with dizziness and balance problems each year and is among the most common presentations. The recently established Balance Disorders and Ataxia Service will see a further 3500 patients in its first year with numbers expected to rise to 5000 with the expansion of the clinic’s services.

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**For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

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