

Healthcare booming



▲ From left, Member for Lismore Thomas George; Lismore Base Hospital Acting General Manager, Narelle Gleeson; NNSWLHD Chief Executive, Wayne Jones; NNSWLHD Director Clinical Operations, Lynne Weir; Sterilisation Technician Ann-Marie Lukic; Minister for Health Brad Hazzard; Manager CSSD Ruth Strickland-Ross; Health Infrastructure Senior Project Manager, Justin Barrett; Sterilisation Technician Jodie Nixon; Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW Ben Franklin; and NNSWLHD Board Chair Brian Pezzutti.

The final two floors in the soon-to-be completed South Tower of Lismore Base Hospital were opened to visiting dignitaries and local media for a sneak peak last month.

Minister for Health Brad Hazzard, Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW Ben Franklin, and Member for Lismore Thomas George toured the new theatre complex and Central Sterilising

Services Department (CSSD) which are part of the \$320 million hospital redevelopment.

During his visit, Minister Hazzard also
cont. on page 4



Page 7

Emergency Physician, Dr Charlotte Hall visits NSW Parliament



Page 10

We chat to General Surgeon, Dr Austin Curtin as he winds down his public hospital surgery work

The Northern NSW Local Health District Board and Executive are committed to fostering a safe and inclusive work environment. Improving workplace culture is a key priority for 2017-18, with an emphasis on enhancing staff wellbeing and increasing communication throughout the organisation.

The last month has delivered some great results for our staff and health services, as well as some challenges.

Most recently, I am pleased to report that Health Services in the Richmond Valley underwent an in-depth accreditation review last week and the feedback from the surveyors was fabulous.

There were no major concerns raised by the surveying team and I received positive feedback from the team in relation to improvements health services have made in the areas of staff support and staff wellbeing, which the surveyors described as a positive culture.

With a continued focus on promoting a positive culture within our workplaces, I am confident we will continue to see further improvements in these areas over the coming months.

We also recently welcomed the NSW Minister for Health, Brad Hazzard to tour some of our facilities and witness the progress of infrastructure and capital works projects which are underway.

In late February, the Bureau of Health Information released the results of the 2016 Adult Admitted Patient Survey.

The results for the Northern NSW Local Health District were again positive and encouraging.

Almost all patients across the LHD (96%) reported that they always encountered polite and courteous staff when arriving at hospital. At some individual facilities, this figure was as high as 98%.

Overall, 74% of patients across the district rated the care they received as 'very good', which represented the highest result for any health district across NSW.

I was also encouraged to see that many of our results had improved on the previous year's report, which shows that our staff are continuing to work hard to improve on what are already high levels of patient care.

Among the challenges in recent weeks was the release of findings from the NSW Deputy State Coroner on the death of patient, Michaela Perrin in 2014.

We continue to extend our sincere apologies and condolences to Ms Perrin's family for their tragic loss, and acknowledge that Ms Perrin did not receive the standard of care we expect.



As an organisation, we have made significant improvements in the time since Ms Perrin's death, in order to prevent such an event from ever occurring again. We continue to invest in training, education and systems for the care and safety of all our patients.

Wayne Jones
Chief Executive

From the Board Chair



Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD) continues to see ongoing developments which position our hospitals and services in good stead for future growth.

This month the LHD has again been fortunate to have a visit by the NSW Minister for Health, Brad Hazzard. These visits provide the Minister with an opportunity see these developments

first hand and the opportunity to meet with our clinicians and community.

Likewise, the visits by the Minister are our chance to showcase how well we have utilised funding which can assist with lobbying into the future.

On this particular visit the Minister undertook a tour of the new Operating Theatres and Central Sterilising Services Department at Lismore Base Hospital, a visit to Ballina District Hospital to view the start of building works for the new operating theatres, and met with community at the old Byron Bay Hospital site on which the Minister has agreed to a six-month moratorium on the sale of the site. This is to enable community, together with Byron Shire Council, to put up a proposal for community use of the site.

Other infrastructure developments recently completed or underway for the LHD include upgrades to the Jali Health Post at Cabbage Tree Island, Bonalbo Multipurpose Service, and works at The Tweed Hospital. The NNSWLHD also

looks forward to an announcement and purchase of the site for the new Tweed Valley Hospital.

I would like to reiterate the essential contribution that all staff, Clinicians and our community make to our health services in ensuring that we provide patient centred care within a positive workplace culture.

In recognition of this the Board has been kept up to date on the development of the NNSWLHD Cultural and Wellbeing Plan and I encourage you to embrace opportunities to be involved as they arise.

The recent successful accreditation of the Richmond Health Services is an example and a testament to the efforts of all our Staff, Clinicians and Community representatives.

Brian Pezzutti
Board Chair

Collaborative approach improves wellbeing

An innovative project has delivered significant change in just one year for patients living in Residential Aged Care at Urbenville Multipurpose Service (MPS).

As an MPS, the Urbenville facility serves as a centre for both medical services and residential services for older people in the community.

A year-long project has delivered improvements in several key areas for people living at Urbenville MPS. These include improvements in levels of physical wellbeing and comfort, mood and wellbeing, relationships between residents, their carers and staff, and overall quality of life.

Urbenville MPS was one of 25 MPS across NSW given support throughout 2017 to implement the Principles of Care for Living Well in Multipurpose Services developed by the NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI).

These Principles of Care were developed to support staff in providing care for residents of Multipurpose Services not as patients in hospital, but as people living in their home.

They include eight principles to assist an MPS in adopting person-centred residential aged care approaches to enhance quality of life and lifestyle for people who call the MPS home.

The team at Urbenville were supported using the Institute for Health Care Improvement Collaborative Model to implement the Principles of Care and achieve rapid, small scale improvements and share their experiences.

"The benefits this project has brought are easily recognisable in the survey results," Northern NSW Local Health District Director Clinical Operations, Lynne Weir, said.

"Thanks to the commitment from our staff, this collaborative approach has made a far better home for the residents and job satisfaction for the staff. It is amazing how much has been achieved," Lynne said.

Thanks to the changes made throughout the year, residents reported improvements across four of the eight

principles – namely in informed and involved, care planning and assessment, dining and expertise in aged care.

Carers and family members noted improvements across five of the eight principles, including being informed and involved, and recreation and leisure.

Staff identified improvements in all eight principles, three of which received a rating of 100 per cent.

Residents and staff reported improvements across all eight domains of the standardised outcome measures, including quality of life and relationships with staff.

Some of the key changes implemented at Urbenville as part of the project included:

- removal of pre-packaged condiments in Aged Care and bringing butter and an assortment of jams, spreads and sauces back to the table,
- replacing plastic thermal crockery with ceramic dinnerware,
- introducing a pet visiting program,

- establishing a gardening club,
 - hosting Karaoke / live entertainment sessions by local musicians,
 - purchasing a bread maker so that residents can have fresh bread regularly
 - establishing a fortnightly school visits program with children from the local public school, and a weekly preschool visiting program
 - introducing Skype for residents to keep in touch with loved ones
 - sourcing funding for a deck to increase useable outdoor space (currently under construction)
 - redesigning the space used for recreation and dining, and relocating the lounge area to provide a more private area for residents
 - reviewing the activities program, with residents now going on regular outings and exploring new opportunities for social interaction outside of the facility
- For more information about the Principles of Care for Living Well in an MPS, visit www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au.



▲ From left, Urbenville MPS resident Mary Armstrong, Activity Officer Kathleen Goldthorpe, Nurse Manager Nicole Ellevsen, and resident Heather Wilson making bread.

Kids under five to get free flu jabs

Children between six months and five years old will be eligible for free flu jabs from April this year, under an influenza vaccination program offered by the NSW Government.

\$3.5 million is being invested for the vaccination program, following last year's severe flu season.

"The program will target more than

400,000 children and ensure better protection for them and the wider community," NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

Parents will be able to access the free flu shot from their usual immunisation provider: their GP, Aboriginal Medical Service, community health centre or local council.

Rain, rain, go away.

While the current spell of rainy weather seems to be abating, I'm sure I'm not the only person reflecting cautiously on the upcoming anniversary of the March/ April flood.



Fiona Baker
Editor

Nearly one year on, the effects of that weekend are still being felt in my town and many others.

Every time I drive past a paddock slowly filling with muddy pools I feel for those who are still getting back on their feet, and for their sakes I hope that this storm season passes uneventfully into the winter.

With Easter and the school holidays not far off, the year seems to be hurtling along at a great pace. Already, we're seeing reports and results from 2017 come into play, such as the collaborative project on Living Well in an MPS which the staff and residents at Urbenville implemented throughout last year.

The results from that program have been outstanding, with improvements in almost every area, thanks to a suite of simple, but meaningful, changes.

It shows what can be achieved by such a collaborative approach to improving the quality of life for those residents living under our care.

Northern exposure

Editor: Fiona Baker

Phone: 6620 2141

Email: fiona.baker2@ncahs.health.nsw.gov.au

Northern Exposure is published 11 times a year by the Northern NSW Local Health District. We welcome your contributions, suggestions and feedback.

March cover image: *Richmond River, Ballina* - Jeremy Billett

Nurses and midwives join North Coast health boom

from page 1

welcomed new nurses and midwives to the Richmond Network at an afternoon tea.

In total, 75 graduates are launching their careers at health services across the Northern NSW Local Health District.

"I can't think of a better place than the beautiful Northern Rivers in which to start a nursing or midwifery career. I am

delighted to welcome these new recruits to what will surely be a very rewarding job caring for our local patients," Mr George said.

"I wish all our new starters the very best of luck with their careers and thank them for choosing to make such an invaluable contribution to our local hospital and health services."



▲ 2018 graduate nurses and midwives with Lismore Base Hospital Clinical Nurse Educators Nicola Scanlon and Charmaine Crispin, Minister Hazzard, Thomas George and Ben Franklin.

◀ Minister Hazzard and Mr George inspect equipment in one of the new operating theatres at Lismore Base Hospital, with Nursing Unit Manager, Theatres, Leanne Seiffert (at front).

Check out NNSWLHD Facebook page

The Northern NSW Local Health District Facebook page is used for a range of promotional activities, including the Health Promotion newsletter, pictured right, and by the LHD Media Unit to promote local events and celebrate the achievements of staff and volunteers.

It is regularly updated with the happenings across the LHD. Check out our [page](#) today!



Work begins on Ballina upgrades

Patients in Ballina will soon benefit from a new, state-of-the-art operating theatre complex under the second stage in a \$7.35 million redevelopment at the Ballina District Hospital.

Minister for Health Brad Hazzard and Ben Franklin, Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW, announced the start of demolition works for Stage 2 of the joint Commonwealth and State funded redevelopment when they toured the region last month.

"Modern facilities are key to ensuring our clinicians and hospital staff can continue to provide the high-quality health care that our local communities deserve," Mr Franklin said.

"Stage 2 of this significant redevelopment will pave the way for upgrades to surgical services at Ballina District Hospital, with a new operating theatre and a new recovery area."

Construction will soon begin on new back-of-house services.

These will include a loading dock and storage space (including space for biomedical equipment testing), plant room, maintenance office and workshop, and a new medical records department.

The full scope of works, to be completed by late 2018, also includes



▲ From left, NNSWLHD Board Chair Brian Pezzutti; Acting Executive Officer/ Director of Nursing BDH, Denise McCall; Minister for Health Brad Hazzard; NNSWLHD Manager Capital Works, Peter Cleary; and Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW, Ben Franklin inspect plans for the latest stage of upgrades at Ballina District Hospital.

stores and utilities, IT and office spaces and staff amenities. Stage 1 was completed in early 2017, with significant

medical imaging upgrades, including a new CT scanner and ultrasound services.

Champions help patients go smoke-free

Smoke-free strategies have been helping patients in Northern NSW ditch the cigarettes throughout 2017.

Thanks to a \$1500 Health Promotion grant, six departments within the Northern NSW Local Health District have been focussing on helping patients become smoke-free. In December 2017, project outcomes for each team were evaluated, revealing a range of successful results.

Collectively, the 'Tobacco Champions' Linda Whitehurst (BCH), Lyn Menchin and Lynda Burch (LBH), Kerrie Ann Lahrs and Ania Ziemski (TTH) and Elspeth Findlay (Murwillumbah Hospital):

- Provided 254 clients with tobacco treatment support
- Led 6 Helping U 2 Quit groups
- Trained over 147 additional staff from across disciplines in tobacco treatment support
- Conducted approximately 28 staff education and training sessions

- Completed 295 smokerlyzer readings

In total, the Champions confirmed that 31 people had become smoke-

free (validated by a smokerlyzer reading) and an additional 78 people had reduced the number of cigarettes smoked as a result of interventions.



▲ From left, Tobacco Champions Lyn Menchin, Linda Whitehurst, Kerrie-Ann Lahrs and Lynda Burch. Absent are Elspeth Findlay and Ania Ziemski.

Safe and steady at Murwillumbah



Patients at Murwillumbah District Hospital (MDH) will be able to move around with increased ease thanks to a donation from two local clubs.

A 'Sara Steady' transfer aid was donated by the Murwillumbah Central Rotary Club and the Murwillumbah Lions Club.

It will be used in the Medical, Surgical and Rehabilitation Units.

The donation was made possible thanks to the family of a previous patient and the generous support of the two clubs.

Rotary and Lions club members visited the hospital to present the donation to Acting Deputy Director of Nursing, Wendy Park.

"We're extremely grateful for the time and effort that has gone into providing us with this piece of equipment," Ms Park said.

"The aid enables patients to be moved more easily around the ward with the help of nursing staff, making the whole process a lot easier and giving more independence to the patient."

◀ From left, Murwillumbah Central Rotary Club members Graham McCrae, Denis Hallworth, Anni Brownjohn and Peter Kelly with MDH Nursing Unit Manager Surgical Ward, Kevin Behm; MDH Acting Deputy Director of Nursing, Wendy Park; and Murwillumbah Lions Club member Peter Richards.

Inkah wins Susan Law Memorial Prize

Transition to Mental Health Nursing Program (TMHNP) graduate, Inkah Fischer, has taken out the 2017 Susan Law Memorial Prize.

This prize is awarded to the nurse who shows the best academic and clinical skills as rated by their managers, educators and peers over the course of the year-long TMHNP.

Inkah is now working permanently within Mental Health in the Northern NSW Local Health District.

The Prize honours Susan Law's legacy as a Mental Health clinician, educator and program facilitator.

From the mid-1980s Susan worked with several organisations in and around Grafton, including the NSW Rural Health Support Unit, Grafton Community Mental Health and the School Link Program in clinical and organisational roles.

Susan later took up a position with Lismore Area

Mental Health in policy development and education.

Throughout her career Susan advocated for and developed local initiatives to improve mental health service delivery.

Much of Susan's work became the basis for state and national benchmarks in mental health programs.

Susan believed strongly in a holistic approach to mental health care, and in empowering individuals and families in the rehabilitation process.

The TMHNP program has been run in Lismore since 2012, giving 28 Registered Nurses the skills they need to work in the Mental Health setting in that time.

Over the course of their 12 month rotation the TMHNP participants combine clinical placements with fortnightly education sessions and academic studies.

These requirements include oral projects, a



▲ Inkah Fischer receives the Susan Law Memorial Prize from Richmond/ Clarence Network Mental Health Manager, Warren Shaw.

mental state competency exam, and major written assignments critically examining aspects of Mental

Health Nursing such as risk assessment, models of care, legislation, and contemporary mental health care.

Emergency training breaks new ground

Communication and teamwork were just some of the skills in focus during a recent visit of emergency experts to the NSW State Parliament.

Lismore-based Emergency Physician, Dr Charlotte Hall and Pilot Michael Aspinall met with Minister for Health Brad Hazzard and Member for Lismore Thomas George in Sydney to highlight the issue of patient deaths due to medical error in Australian hospitals.

An Australian study found that nationally, around 18,000 patient deaths each year were due to medical error, with 75 per cent of these likely to be the result of weak non-technical skills.¹

Poor communication and poor teamwork are just two issues which a new training workshop aims to improve for clinicians and staff working in emergency settings.

Dr Charlotte Hall and Maclean-based Dr Dean Robertson have teamed up with International Pilots Michael Aspinall and Anthony Lock to create a ground breaking "Human Factors" training workshop addressing these issues.

The Advanced Emergency Performance Training (ADEPT) course is a two-day workshop, that uses ideas and techniques pioneered in the Aviation industry and adapts them for use in a health care setting.

The inaugural ADEPT workshop was held in Lismore in October 2017 at University Centre for Rural Health (UCRH). The course was well attended

by local health professionals and was an outstanding success.

ADEPT is accredited for Continuing Professional Development points by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

It has also received endorsement from the NSW Clinical Excellence Commission and the Agency for Clinical Innovation.

Minister Hazzard acknowledged the difficulties faced by many clinicians and expressed his commitment to

championing positive changes in the workplace to benefit both patients and staff, including training in non-technical skills as a priority.

The next ADEPT workshops will be held in Lismore on 7-8 April and 26-27 May.

Nurses, Doctors and Allied Health Professionals are invited to attend and can register their interest online at: emergencyprotocols.org.au.

1. Politics and publishing: the Quality in Australian Health Care Study. The Medical Journal of Australia, Vol 163, 6 November 1995.



▲ From left, Minister for Health Brad Hazzard; Lismore Base Hospital Emergency Physician, Dr Charlotte Hall; Pilot Michael Aspinall and Member for Lismore Thomas George at the Parliament of NSW, Sydney.

Samson Challenge strengthens Our Kids



◀ Competitors from across Northern NSW and as far afield as Melbourne and Brisbane put their strength and endurance to the test for the Samson Challenge on 3 March in Lismore.

The annual fitness challenge raises money for Our Kids, a charity which provides specialised medical equipment and resources for children in hospital in Lismore and the surrounding areas.

This year's event raised over \$25,000. More than 570 competitors joined the challenge, making it the biggest year to date. 120 volunteers also assisted in running the event.

This year the title was won by the Fit Farm Training Team who finished the course in the fastest time. There were also individual winners in a range of other categories.



Changes to codeine access: a health literacy perspective

Medicines that contain codeine are no longer available without prescription. This may prompt questions from patients about pain management. You may also encounter more requests for a codeine prescription.

To support these conversations, the Therapeutic Goods Administration has provided some sample plain language responses to common queries:

"I need something to help with my pain. I used to take codeine but it is no longer available in the pharmacy."

A: Over-the-counter (OTC) codeine-containing medicines have been used in the past for the self-treatment of chronic pain problems. However, we know these are not effective at the OTC dose, can have serious and potentially life threatening side effects and are not first-line in treating chronic pain so we don't always prescribe them.

"Can I treat my pain with something other than medicine?"

A: Yes, there are other pain management strategies available. (Discuss the different options)

"I have used codeine for a long time and it works well. When I don't use it I have headaches, body aches and diarrhoea. Codeine is the only thing that works for me."

A: Pain medicines with codeine only provide a short-term benefit. If your pain is worse when you don't take them, it may be because you have become dependent on them. Using other medicines or non-drug methods have been shown to have better long-term benefits.

For more tips on talking about codeine, visit the TGA website [here](https://www.tga.gov.au).

Farewell Geoff Sullivan

Environmental Health Officer, Geoff Sullivan was farewelled by colleagues from the Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD) Public Health Unit last month after a long career in health.

Geoff began his career working as a trainee Health and Building Inspector in Sydney in 1971 before obtaining qualifications in Public Health and Building Inspection and later becoming a Senior Inspector with Fairfield Municipal Council.

Geoff moved to Lismore in 1987 in the role of Health Surveyor with the Regional Office of NSW Health Department. Geoff ended up remaining in this role for the next 30 years, through many changes within the LHD

and in his profession.

Throughout his career, Geoff was involved in research in a variety of issues, including pesticide drift from aerial crop spraying, waste water reuse, and skin penetration.

Geoff has also been involved in consulting with councils on water, sewer and reuse risk assessment processes.

Assistant Director, NNSWLHD Public Health Unit, Greg Bell, said Geoff possessed a wealth of knowledge in Environmental and Public Health, and his reliable, friendly and positive approach to the job made him a pleasure to work with.

"Geoff always went the extra mile to assist people," Greg said.



▲ From left, NNSWLHD Assistant Director Public Health, Greg Bell, congratulates Geoff Sullivan on his retirement.

Upcoming Events...

This new section will feature upcoming events across the Northern NSW Local Health District.

If you have any events you would like to include in this listing, please email dates and a web link or email address to fiona.baker2@ncahs.health.nsw.gov.au. Entries should be received with as much notice as possible.



Pathways to a healthy career

Students from Trinity Catholic College were treated to career insights straight from the source when they visited Lismore Base Hospital recently.

The group of Year 12 Work Studies students heard from staff and clinicians about various pathways to employment within the health care system, including many roles which involve on-the-job training or TAFE requirements.

The students heard from speakers in a range of departments including Corporate Services, Domestic Services, Security, Customer Services and Nursing, and had a brief tour of the hospital.

As part of the visit, students received information on how to apply for roles within the hospital, training opportunities that are available, and heard personal stories from staff about their own career paths through different departments within the health system.



▲ School students from Trinity Catholic College, Lismore, visited Lismore Base Hospital recently as part of their Year 12 Work Studies class.

Choice on the menu at Murwillumbah

Patients at Murwillumbah District Hospital are now enjoying a more personalised, enhanced dining experience thanks to a new menu system.

With My Food Choice, each patient receives a pictorial menu offering a choice of at least 12 new hot meals at lunch and dinner. There is also a vegetarian menu.

"My Food Choice is a whole new way of producing and serving meals that puts patients at the heart of meal time, improving their hospital experience," Carmen Rechbauer, Executive Director Clinical Support Services for HealthShare NSW, said.

"It is the biggest change to hospital food in decades. We aim to make the meal experience a highlight of each patient's stay."

HealthShare NSW has worked closely with Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD) management and dietitians to ensure My Food Choice meets the needs of the local community.

"My Food Choice gives our patients a wide variety of new, nutritionally compliant and tastier meals," Wayne Jones, Chief Executive, NNSWLHD, said.

"Thanks to this system, our patients are receiving better service, and we are actively supporting them to achieve better nutrition outcomes."

Patients will be able to choose the meal that best suits their immediate feelings of hunger and wellness. Accurate ordering will dramatically cut food waste.

The same Food Service staff member who takes the patient's order will prepare and deliver the meal, building

accountability and creating a more personalised service.

My Food Choice is live in 21 hospitals and will be introduced in all NSW public hospitals by late 2019.

Patients at hospitals in Byron Bay, Ballina, Lismore, Casino, Maclean and Grafton are also enjoying My Food Choice.



▲ Food Services Staff at Murwillumbah District Hospital. From left to right, back row: Karen Mitchell, Melissa Muir, Shane Reardon (HealthShare NSW), and Christine North. Front row: Julie Corten, Anne Buckley and Lesley Thomas.

Profile : Dr Austin Curtin

This month, Northern Exposure caught up with Lismore Base Hospital General Surgeon, Dr Austin Curtin, as he winds down his public surgical work and makes way for new surgeons to begin their careers in the Northern Rivers.

When Austin Curtin first arrived in Lismore in 1985, there were five surgeons working in the area. Then 32 years old, Austin left Sydney with his wife and three children to move to what he identified was a growing region with a need for more medical specialists and services.

Austin had visited Lismore Base Hospital as a trainee surgeon, and thanks in large part to the lure of being able to work closely with one of his mentors, Dr Bill Buddee, Austin made the difficult decision to leave the city.

"I really liked the standard of medicine that was being practiced at Lismore," Austin said.

"It's so far away from Sydney, and we sit on the other side of the border from Queensland, so it's been allowed to develop into a really good community-oriented way of practising healthcare."

An 11th hour decision to stay in Australia and not pursue specialist surgical oncology training in the USA helped cement Austin's decision to move to the country. He wanted to be a general surgeon, and feared that the specialist training might narrow his expertise to the point where he would be stuck in one particular field.

"I really liked acute medicine surgery, trauma surgery, and vascular surgery, and I just could not narrow down," Austin said.

A third generation doctor, Austin was drawn to surgery by the idea of being able to affect real and immediate change for his patients. That feeling of satisfaction and progress still inspires him to this day.

"You can actually treat people and actually see a result for your work. They actually get better, mostly, within a short period of time," Austin said.

"Medicine is a fantastic profession because you get to be involved with people at really decisive moments in their life. You're really privileged in that sense, but you also get to manage them and you do cure people as a surgeon."

Living in Tregeagle proved beneficial for Austin's family as well as his career. Together, Austin and Annie have five adult children, and seven grandchildren, most of whom live in regional centres.

"One of the really nice things about leaving Sydney is actually changing the way your family sees the world. They are all quite capable of living anywhere," Austin said.

"If you live in a rural city or town you actually are part of a community, your kids go to school with the children of the accountant, the plumber, the mechanic, the shop owners; you all know who each other are."



▲ Dr Austin Curtin with nursing staff in theatre at Lismore Base Hospital. Image: Jacklyn Wagner

Austin trained at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, before taking up a post in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the early 1980s. He had also wanted to join the Army Reserves for some time, but it wasn't until many years later, after 9/11, that Austin felt he was ready to take that step.

"I thought at that stage that I had all the skills as a rural general surgeon, so I felt quite comfortable operating in pretty much every body cavity," Austin said.

Deployed to Afghanistan, and later Iraq, Austin experienced first-hand the difficulties faced by soldiers, both during their tours and on return home.

"Soldiers have to run two lives, leading that military life over there, dependent on your mates, and then trying to keep control of the life that you're leading at home, it's not an easy thing to do," Austin said.

In his 33 years of practicing in Lismore, Austin has seen Lismore Base Hospital transform from a service-providing hospital into a teaching hospital. Today, medical students, nurses and allied health students, prevocational students and registrars all come to Lismore to receive training and input from experienced senior clinicians across the spectrum of medical disciplines.

"There are a lot of like-minded people here now, and they're interested in the results that we achieve and how to improve the situation and get better," Austin said.

Being a part of this transformation has been one of the great joys of Austin's career, to the point where Lismore is now poised to become a regional training hub, and research and training opportunities are growing all the time.

"The best way to develop our regional workforce is to actually grow them in the country. If we can do that, we will have great success."

Teaching the next generation of surgeons is a passion for Austin, and it helps keep him on his toes.

"It's great to have them pointing out that you lack knowledge in certain areas, re-educating you and bringing you up to date all the time," Austin said.

Austin is retiring from work in the public system, having done strenuous on-call work for more than 33 years. He will continue to teach medical students and help colleagues in theatre, but his own practice at St Vincent's Hospital will slowly wind down over the coming years, leaving room for his other pursuits such as woodworking, learning to fly, and his family.

His retirement will also make way for other young surgeons to get a foot in the door.

"I'm almost not ready to retire, but it's time to allow new young people to move in and get themselves going," Austin said.

"No doubt, the new young gun knows more than me!"

Gift aids life-support training

Staff at Casino and District Memorial Hospital (CDH) will now have access to a life-saving training aid thanks to a generous donation.

The Laerdal Advanced Life Support Baby Trainer 200 is a portable skill trainer enabling realistic infant resuscitation training.

It provides staff with the opportunity to practice basic and advanced CPR skills with a life-like mannequin.

The mannequin, valued at \$6823.50, has been donated by the Humpty Dumpty Foundation.

It will be used to provide ongoing education and assessment of clinical skills for staff involved in the care of paediatric patients

and their families at the hospital.

"We are fortunate to be the recipient of this generous gift from the Humpty Dumpty Foundation," Clinical Nurse Manager, Kayelene Guthrie said.

"The baby trainer will be an extremely useful training tool for our staff, and will ensure that staff can provide the best quality care to our patients."

The donation was made possible by a team effort from staff at CDH including Fran Passfield, Debra Jaynes, Joanne Wilton and Bec Lyons who assisted with the application and supporting information provided to the Humpty Dumpty Foundation.



▲ Registered Nurse Fran Passfield with the ALS Baby Trainer donated to Casino and District Memorial Hospital.

Spotlight on eliminating Hepatitis C

Lismore played host to an international expert in Hepatitis C this month, as part of an innovative discussion on how to eliminate the virus.

Dr Jorge Mera is the Director of Infectious Diseases for the Cherokee Nation Health Services in Oklahoma in the United States.

Dr Mera, a leader in the field of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) elimination, shared his experiences in leading the charge against HCV in the community.

The round-table discussion was hosted by Lismore Liver Clinic and chaired by Dr Mark Cornwell, Lismore Gastroenterologist and Medical Director of the Lismore Liver Clinic.

"We were very interested to hear from Dr Mera's first-hand experience of driving the elimination of hepatitis C in his community and sharing his experiences with us," Dr Cornwell said.

Aboriginal Medical Services, Drug and Alcohol, Mental Health leaders and liver clinicians from across the region will benefit from Dr Mera's insights gained through the HCV elimination program he leads in the Cherokee Nation, one of the largest tribally operated health care systems in the USA.

"The new direct acting anti-viral hepatitis C treatments are cost

effective, safe, and highly effective, and have a cure rate of greater than 95%," Dr Cornwell said.

"In March 2016, the new treatments were listed on the PBS."

Since the introduction of the new treatments, 21% of the 5,110 people estimated to be living with HCV in Northern Rivers region have been treated.

People can access treatment from their GP or by making an appointment at the Lismore Liver Clinic, it is that simple.

Northern Rivers General Practitioners and the Lismore Liver Clinic have a long history of working together with the aim of Eliminating HCV by providing innovative treatments for all patients.



▲ Lismore Liver Clinic Staff with Dr Jorge Mera. From left to right, Darren Smyth CNC, Debbie-Anne Wilson CNS, Cherie Minchin CNS, Krista Zohrab CNC and Dr Jorge Mera.

Patients front of mind for bowls club

A charity day at the Cabarita Beach Women's Bowl's Club has netted \$1500.00 for oncology patients in Tweed Heads.

The Club recently presented The Tweed Hospital Cancer Care Unit with the generous donation after a day on the green raised money to improve patient comfort in the unit.

"Some of our members have personally visited the Unit, and we recognise the valuable contribution this Unit provides to the community," Club Secretary, Lyn Sheppard, said.

The donation will go towards improving patient comfort in the treatment area.

"We are really appreciative of the kind support," Cancer Care Nursing Unit Manager, Sarah Burton, said.

"It's the patients that benefit. They are the ones going through the difficult time, so the support from the community is always welcome."

Emergency Director off to the Apple Isle

Colleagues from across the Richmond Network gathered to farewell Lismore Base Hospital Emergency Department Director, Dr Chris Gavaghan at an afternoon tea on 23 February.

Dr Gavaghan has been with Lismore Base Hospital for 26 years, since he commenced employment as the first Emergency Medicine Specialist on 28 January 1992.

Dr Gavaghan has been an integral member of the Emergency Department as both a Staff Specialist and Visiting Medical Officer, serving for more than 20 years as Director of Emergency and almost as long in the position of Director Medical Retrieval for the Richmond Network.

"Before coming here, I had never been in the one job for more than a few years. I don't know what happened when I got to Lismore!" Dr Gavaghan said.

"One of the most rewarding things about being in this job for so long is

seeing doctors I worked with as trainees now come back as senior clinicians," Dr Gavaghan said.

Dr Gavaghan has led the Emergency Department through many changes with his calm demeanour, compassion and respect for his patients and fellow clinicians and staff.

"I have really come to value the whole team of staff working in the delivery of emergency care to our community.

"The teamwork needed to provide good care involves all staff from the clerical, nursing, wardsmen, security, catering, cleaning and office staff as well as the medical staff. Without all of these people working toward a common goal, we would not achieve the target we are after, which is essentially to deliver the best care we can," Dr Gavaghan said.

Dr Gavaghan's skills, dedication and good humour will be greatly missed, as he heads to Tasmania with his family for the next phase in his career.



▲ Lismore Base Hospital Director of Emergency, Dr Chris Gavaghan cuts the cake surrounded by colleagues and staff at his farewell.

The last word...

Farewell Maureen Lane

Maureen Lane was farewelled at Lismore Base Hospital recently, as she reflected on a lengthy and successful career in health.

Maureen began work in 1973 as a Registered Nurse at Murwillumbah District Hospital. Maureen worked at various hospitals in Northern NSW and in Sydney before returning to Byron Bay District Hospital in 1981 as a Midwife and General Nurse. Following this, Maureen also worked in Community Nursing and Child Health.

In 1998 Maureen was appointed as Manager, Community and Allied Health for Ballina and Byron Shires, and in 2005 Maureen became Manager, Planning and Performance. Maureen has remained in this role until her retirement in February 2018.

Throughout her 47-year career, Maureen played a key role in Nursing and in the development of clinical service plans and service agreements for the Northern NSW Local Health District.

Maureen's exceptional knowledge of the district and her expertise in



▲ NNSWLHD Chief Executive Wayne Jones, Planning Support Officer Michelle Wallis, Manager Planning and Performance Maureen Lane, and former NNSWLHD Board Chair Hazel Bridget.

planning and service analysis played a major role in the expansion of the Northern NSW Local Health District we now see.

Staff and colleagues paid tribute to Maureen's work ethic and wished her well as she moves on to other pursuits in retirement.

Domestic Services farewells Marlene



Staff gathered for an afternoon tea at Lismore Base Hospital recently to farewell Domestic Services staff member Marlene Martin.

Marlene commenced work at Kyogle Hospital in 1970, where she worked until 1974.

In 1998 Marlene began work at Lismore Base Hospital, remaining in her Domestic Services position until her retirement this year.

Throughout her 22 years with the Northern NSW Local Health District and its former iterations, Marlene has been a reliable and valued member of the workforce.

Marlene's work ethic and attention to detail will be greatly missed by the domestic services team.

◀ Marlene Martin receives her certificate for long service at a farewell afternoon tea in Lismore.