

What's News



breast cancer
research centre-wa
Incorporating Perth Breast Cancer Institute

WELCOME TO THE 2023 AUTUMN EDITION



Prof. Arlene Chan AM
Medical Oncologist MBBS, FRACP, MMed (Palliative Care)

Welcome to the 2023 Autumn Edition of What's News.

We are excited to bring you our latest newsletter, filled with important updates and inspiring stories.

We are thrilled to introduce our new Board member, Robyn Sutherland, and our new fellow, Brendan Kirwin to the BCRC-WA family.

Robyn brings 20 years of board and non-executive director experience to BCRC-WA. She also has a long history within the private and public medical sectors. We are excited to have her as our newest board member.

Our fellowship program is a vital part of our organization with education as one of our core functions. Brendan joins us after spending 5 years in Sydney for his oncology training. Following his one year fellowship with BCRC-WA, Brendan will have completed his specialist training to become a medical oncologist.

You can read about Robyn and Brendan on [page 2](#).

You will also find a note from our CEO, Sarah Fordham, on [page 3](#), sharing her insights on our vision and mission, and highlighting our accomplishment over the past few months.

This edition of What's News features Suzanne Waring's Story of Hope. Suzanne was diagnosed with early stage breast cancer in 2017. Her 5-year journey with breast cancer can be found on [page 4](#).

[Page 5](#) features our research successes and impacts, showcasing the important work we are undergoing here at BCRC-WA. I am happy to announce a new paper, a new trial, as well as some significant milestones reached in 2022.

For those interested in learning more about genetic testing and counselling, [pages 6 and 7](#) feature a medical article entitled "What you need to know about Genetic Testing and Counselling for Familial Breast Cancer" written by Bhavya Vora, our Genetic Counsellor.

We also have two artist highlights on [pages 8 and 9](#), featuring Circle Work Art's Caroline Hillcoat and Tracy Robinson. These talented artists are both patients of BCRC-WA and have generously offered to fundraise on behalf of our organization. Both artists are proudly featured on the walls of BCRC-WA so make sure you have a peak into suites 404, 405 and 407 the next time you're here.

Finally, on [pages 10 and 11](#), you will find our fundraising news, highlighting the many creative ways our supporters have chosen to give to our cause. A very big thank you to the Nicholas Kehoe for swimming the Rottneest Channel on behalf of BCRC-WA and to Connie and Joel for their outstanding head shaving efforts in memory of their good friend Deb.

Thank you for your continued support, and we hope you enjoy reading our newsletter.



Suzanne's story - [page 4](#)

NEW BOARD MEMBER

Robyn Sutherland

Robyn has significant Board experience through non-executive director appointments in both the community and health settings spanning 20 years.

She has a proven history of strong Board contribution and relationship development. Her key board strengths lie in the wealth of her experience in the strategic and operational management of large hospitals and services in both the public and private sectors where she has built a solid background in leadership, risk management, organisational and clinical governance, and strategic and operational planning and service development.

"I am confident that my years of experience in healthcare will add value to the Board. I feel very privileged to be part of a highly motivated and committed organisation that continues to deliver great outcomes through evidence-based practice and clinical research. From a personal perspective and my own journey of breast cancer I value the opportunity to give something back to others."



Robyn Sutherland

Brendan Kirwin



HELLO FROM OUR NEW FELLOW

Brendan Kirwin

Hello, my name is Brendan the new Breast Cancer research fellow at BCRC-WA.

I am a WA boy, spending my youth in Karratha, Kalgoorlie, Perth and Bunbury. I attended medical school at the University of Western Australia and initially worked at Royal Perth Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital for my internship and residency before moving to Sydney to pursue oncology training. I have been working at Royal North Shore Hospital for 5 years but have been missing the West Coast and the sunsets over the ocean so am glad to be back.

Outside of medicine, I enjoy ocean swimming, going to the theatre and keeping fit.

I feel lucky to be part of the Breast Cancer Research Centre - WA team.

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR NEW CEO

Sarah

I can only start my first newsletter message by saying it is an incredible honor to work with Prof Arlene Chan and the specialists at Perth Breast Cancer Institute. I am very grateful to everyone for making me feel so welcome in this amazing organisation. It has meant I have been able to hit the ground running with several projects at the same time as learning about the services we offer and getting to know everyone.

First impressions are always strong ones and I have been struck by the incredible generosity of our patients and their families. Even in tough times, they think of others. Every day we receive calls from people saying that they are fundraising for us, in memory of a loved one who has fought breast cancer or in celebration of being cleared of breast cancer. Amazing artworks are created and sold, heads are shaved, marathons run, swims to Rottnest are completed, sheep sheared, cakes baked and so much more. It's inspirational.

I have also been delighted to learn that our community exists well beyond Perth with many country towns also supporting us with fundraising and breast cancer awareness events. I look forward to meeting regional supporters and helping to strengthen and build our country network.

And I think network might be one of the most important words that has come to mind when I reflect over my first few months in this role. The daily conversations I observe in our hallways and waiting rooms among patients, families and our staff are about connecting people, ensuring they are supported and feel empowered. We are dedicated to being a centre of excellence in breast cancer care and I would like to acknowledge all our staff who play such a big part in our patients' journey.

What I think many patients who visit us may not be aware of, is behind the doors of Suite 407 lies one of the busiest clinical trials teams in Australia. I can testify to how busy the team of registered nurses, oncologists and clinical research assistants are. With Prof Chan's leadership, this unit continues to save lives and improve the outcomes of women around the world.

My other lasting impression is the amount of laughter we hear every day. I hadn't imagined this would be my experience, but it is heart-warming and evidence that the many quotes about laughter being the best medicine and the best form of therapy are true.



SUZANNE'S

Story

I am not a singer or a politician. Just Suzanne, a 63 year old woman who was diagnosed with early stage unilateral Breast Cancer (Oestrogen and HER2 positive) in 2017.

I have a strong, resilient body and so the diagnosis seemed to be meant for another me, a Suzanne in a parallel universe. I have always had difficulty reconciling myself with being a cancer patient. I felt like an imposter, as though I did not belong in the waiting room of cancer specialists. Yet there I was.

I was fortunate enough to receive the Golden Ticket referral to the wonderful Dr Willsher/Professor Chan team at Hollywood Hospital. With expertise, care and dedication they guided me through a maze of surgical and medical procedures which included a mastectomy, referral for reconstruction, chemotherapy, Herceptin infusions and Tamoxifen. Thanks to them, I have emerged through the final gate of the maze, healed and hopeful. I feel my prize of health and well-being is like a lovely garden I have been given to tend and nurture with care.

This story would not be complete without including my breast reconstruction with Plastic Surgeon, Dr Ian Timms. When I first walked into Dr Timms's Clinic in Subiaco, I thought I would be the odd one out in a waiting room full of would-be Kim Kardashians. On the contrary, Dr Timms works hard to employ his wonderful surgery and artistry to a wide range of people including women like me. He has helped me to smile inside, to walk a little taller and to feel whole again. Now I have no need to dwell on what I have lost but work on the present and make something out of this messiness we call life.



"Now I have no need to dwell on what I have lost but work on the present and make something out of this messiness we call life."

My story ends with a biopsy. At the 5-year mark, I was expecting a gold star and to be sent on my merry way. Instead, I had need for a biopsy, this time on my healthy breast. I felt knocked silly by this final blow. I was no longer proceeding in ignorance. I had travelled this road, and it had many hills and rough surfaces. I remember walking among the historic granite quarries near my home and found my favourite tree, a very old Cork Oak, planted back in the days when the quarries were being worked. Under its graceful canopy, I stood and cried. I pressed my face to the corky bark and felt comfort from the resilience of this beautiful tree.

After what seemed like an agonising wait, I received my results. My tears were unfounded. I never did receive that gold star, but I was pronounced clear of cancer and sent on my merry way.

Thank you to my three amazing specialists. And thank you to my family, both close and extended, for all those words of encouragement. They meant so much and helped me to stay strong and positive.

Suzanne



RESEARCH SUCCESS

and Impacts

New Paper Published

A new research article titled "Prognostic role of immune environment in luminal B early breast cancer" has been published in *Cancer Medicine*. The study was funded by a grant from Helen Sewell.

The research found that in patients with a certain type of breast cancer (hormone receptor-positive and HER2 negative), the immune environment around the tumour was not found to be a significant factor in predicting the risk of cancer recurrence. This is in contrast to other types of breast cancer (triple negative or HER2 positive), where the immune environment does play a role.

This research suggests that immune therapy may be less effective for breast cancer patients with hormone receptor-positive and HER2 negative tumours.

New Trial

We have some exciting news about a new international trial that we're participating in. The trial will involve 6000 women who have hormone receptor-positive early breast cancer, and they will be given a new type of drug called SERDs (Selective Estrogen Receptor Degraders).

The aim of the trial is to see if the new drug is better at preventing breast cancer from returning compared to the current drugs like tamoxifen or aromatase inhibitors.

Women who have previously taken an endocrine drug for at least 2 years but not more than 5 years may be eligible for this trial. The medical oncologists at PBCI will discuss this trial with their patients to determine if it is a good option for them to consider.

Did you know?

Significant Milestones of 2022

- Over **9890 appointments** had taken place in Perth Breast Cancer Institute (PBCI)
- Our psychologists conducted **515 appointments**
- The clinical team at PBCI saw **890 new patients**
- Our geneticist conducted **123 appointments**
- Our surgeons performed **593 procedures** to treat breast cancer
- We had **39 active clinical trials**, 27 sponsored and 12 investigator-initiated trials
- Our Early Breast Care Nurse provided **care and support for 150 patients** completing adjuvant chemotherapy
- **300 patients** were enrolled in clinical trials
- Our Metastatic Breast Care Nurse **provided care and support for 225 patients** & their families
- The PYNKS support group recommenced meetings late in 2022 and **met 5 times** face-to-face
- We welcomed **2 new oncologists** into the team – Drs Peter Lau and Louisa Lo, in February 2022
- **3 new board members** joined our board: David Della Bona, Sal Vallelonga, Robyn Sutherland

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GENETIC TESTING AND COUNSELLING

for Familial Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is a complex disease that is influenced by a variety of factors, including genetics. Genetic counselling is an essential part of the care and management of individuals with breast cancer.

Genetic Counsellors are registered healthcare professionals under the umbrella of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (HGSA). Genetic Counsellors have specialized education in genetics and are trained to assist patients in making informed decisions about their genetic health. They work with doctors to help make appropriate recommendations for ongoing surveillance and management of increased cancer risk for their patients.

Genetic counselling is a communication process that aims to help individuals, couples and families understand and adapt to the medical, psychological, familial, and reproductive implications of the genetic contribution to specific health conditions.

In this article, our resident genetic counsellor, Bhavya Vora, answers questions he often receives from breast cancer patients regarding genetic testing and counselling.

Why do I need counselling when I just want to be tested?

Genetic testing does not always provide a yes or no, black-and-white answer. It is important to discuss these limitations as well as other potential implications before proceeding with genetic testing.

Whilst Genetic Counsellors indeed have training in counselling, these skills are most often used in the collection and provision of genetic information. Some of the topics covered at your appointment include providing an overview of the genetic

testing process and considering the outcomes in the context of an individual and their family. The session provides you with an opportunity to raise concerns, ask questions, plan and prepare for results, and organise relevant management options.

Consulting with a Genetic Counsellor is a two-way flow of information aimed at promoting informed decision-making. It helps to tailor the testing and information for you and your family. In addition, it assists the counsellor to create resources to support family communication about genetic health and provides links for valuable support services such as clinical psychology or cancer support groups.

When should genetic testing for familial breast cancer genes be considered?

You could consider cancer genetic testing if you fall into one of the below categories:

- You are diagnosed with cancer at a young age
- There is a known gene fault identified in your family and you would like to know your risk.
- You have a family history of cancer and no living affected individual is available or interested in genetic testing.
- You are concerned about your lifetime risk of developing cancer

How will a positive genetic test result affect me? How will it affect my family members?

If a pathogenic variant is identified, it will explain your cancer diagnosis. It will also inform you of an increased risk for other associated cancers in your lifetime. In some instances, it could also infer the treatment plan, and help you make relevant decisions regarding surgical management options.

Most familial cancer conditions are dominant, in other words, each first degree relative of an individual with a genetic variant will have a 1 in 2 chance of inheriting the pathogenic variant. These family members could be informed of their risks, enabling them to discuss their options of genetic testing and risk management discussions.

Where can I get tested?

Patients of the Perth Breast Cancer Institute (PBCI) have access to my services. I work closely with the multidisciplinary team at PBCI to provide excellent patient-centred care. The service is dedicated to offering an appointment to everyone who is referred with a minimum wait period and quick turnaround time for the genetic test results.

For those being cared for outside of PBCI, please ask your primary care physician about being tested.

About Bhavya Vora, FHGSA

Bhavya Vora is a certified genetic counsellor. His private genetic counselling service, which is in collaboration with the Perth Breast Cancer Institute, specialises in cancer genetics. He also works in public health at Genetic Services of WA.

For more information, visit www.cancergc.com.au or call 6500 5576.

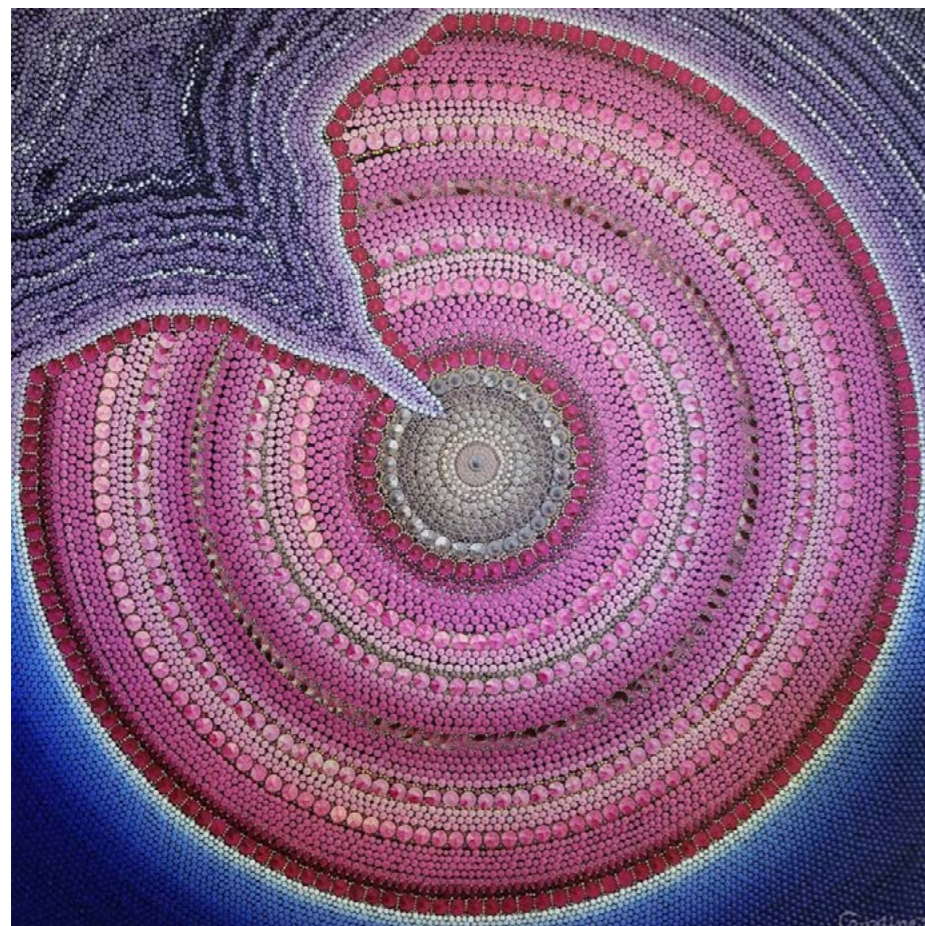


CIRCLE WORK

Aest

I donated 'Boob 1' to the Breast Cancer Research Centre - WA in 2015 when it was still located at The Mount Hospital. I was inspired by my mother who battled the disease but passed away at the age of thirty-nine. My grandmother had also fought and lost. I vividly remember the bravery, the chemo, the sadness and the chaos it brought to my family.

During my yearly mammogram in 2022 DCIS was discovered in my right breast and my journey began. Visiting the new suites at Hollywood Hospital I knew I was in safe hands with Kallyani Ponniah as my surgeon, having genetic testing done and just the wonderful support I received. I decided to have a double mastectomy and I am back in the gym and grabbing my second life with both hands.



Jeannette Devoto, Unit Manager of the BCRC-WA Trials Unit and Caroline Hillcoat, Circle Work Art.



Caroline's works can be viewed in Suites 404 and 405. She is donating 15% of the sale price of her artworks to BCRC-WA. She would like to extend a special thanks to Brooke Fullgrabe, Medical Secretary in Suite 404, for her support in displaying her art in the suites at BCRC-WA.

If you would like to view more of Caroline's works, visit her Instagram and Facebook pages. You can also view them in person on your next visit to BCRC-WA or at her studio in Beaconsfield. Please send her a message on Instagram or Facebook if interested in visiting her studio or purchasing one of her works. You can also head over to Suite 404 where Brooke would be happy to answer any of your questions.

@circleworkart

facebook.com/circleworkart

TRACY

Robinson

I always imagine grabbing a giant paintbrush and brightening up the entire world - buildings, streets, cafes, trees, gardens and of course my favourite, flowers.

I want to turn up the volume of colour and have that same beautiful naivety of a child experiencing the absolute joy of colours.

My Cancer Journey

In September 2022, I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. I am currently going through treatment and the prognosis is very positive. When something like this happens in your life you feel very helpless.

We decided as we have a thriving greeting card business with a growing number of stockists to create a specific card for Breast Cancer Research Centre WA (BCRC-WA). Part of the proceeds of this card pictured in the image will go towards supporting this wonderful charity.



Tracy and her husband, Steven.

Currently Exhibiting

Tracy is exhibiting her artwork at Ootong and Lincoln, starting 26 February 2023, for a few weeks. She is graciously donating 10% of every artwork sold to BCRC-WA.

Ootong and Lincoln, 258 South Terrace, South Fremantle WA 6162

You can view more of Tracy's artworks on her website www.tracyrobinsoncreate.com.au

@tracyrobinsoncreate

facebook.com/TracyRobinsoncreate

NICHOLAS KEHOE'S ROTTNEST CHANNEL SWIM

Raised \$9,158

Having completed the Rottnest Channel Swim in 2019 in a team of 4, Nick already knew what was in store.

He completed the swim in 6 hours and 46 minutes, which was faster than expected as he had predicted the swim would take between 7-8 hours.

Nick's wife, Leia, experienced Breast Cancer in 2019. Doing the South32 Rottnest Channel Swim was a way his way to give back and help more families overcome Breast Cancer.

"After our Breast Cancer journey and successful outcome with the help of the great people at Breast Cancer Research Centre - WA, we wanted to give back," Nick said. "We decided to raise funds and awareness for Breast Cancer by completing the Rottnest Channel Swim Solo. We are very proud and humbled by the community's support, helping to raise over \$9,000 and providing support and encouragement throughout. Just like tackling Breast Cancer, the Rottnest Channel Swim started by forming a fantastic support crew, and I would like to especially thank our support crew for the amazing job, ensuring a safe and successful crossing."

We are so grateful to Nick and Leia. What an incredible feat. Congratulations!



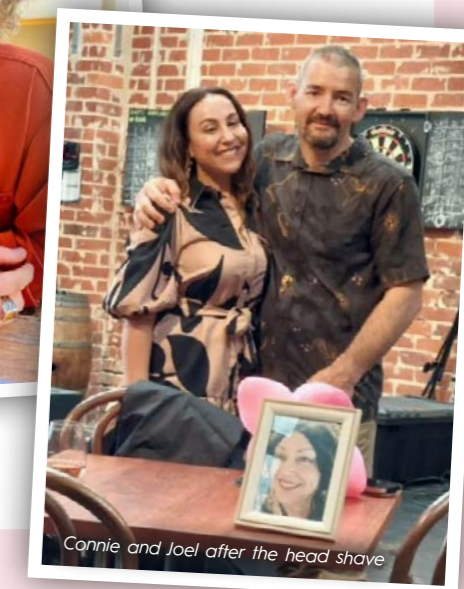
HEAD SHAVE IN MEMORY OF DEBBIE

Raised \$3,910

Connie and her husband Joel organised a head shave in memory of their dear friend, Debbie, on Sunday, March 12th. Having been a patient of Professor Chan's they decided to donate the proceeds to BCRC-WA.

After 18 months of hair growth, Joel publicly shaved his head in honour of Debbie and her husband, Scott.

"The day meant a lot to us and we really wanted to do something to not only honour our dear friend Deb, but we also wanted it to be a success for BCRC-WA," said Connie. "We now know through our friend the amazing work the centre does. I have loads of photos and videos of the day if you needed more content and I'm happy to share."



Leave a Gift in your will



"My decision to leave a gift in my will to the Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA was a purposeful choice. My gift was in memory of my late wife, Janine who received the best treatment and care available from the BCRC-WA team. It gives me great satisfaction that my bequest will have a long-term impact."

- David Park

Your gift can achieve so many things

Your gift can assist our general programs allowing BCRC-WA to apply these funds to research or where it is needed the most.

Contact our Fundraising Coordinator Sarina Menzies on 08 6500 5515 or sarina.menzies@bcrc-wa.com.au and learn more about how you can make a difference.

DONATE

Today

There are many ways you can donate to BCRC-WA



Online at bcrc-wa.com.au



By direct deposit (NAB BSB: 086-006 Acct No: 73798 6097)



Phone us on (08) 6500 5501



In person at BCRC-WA, Suite 407, Hollywood Consulting Centre
91 Monash Avenue, Nedlands WA

Gifts of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

BCRC-WA is self-funded and does not receive any government funding.

Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA

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