

A message from the Chief Executive



Dear friends of the Royal Hospital for Women Foundation,

Thank you for your wonderful support throughout the first half of 2010. It has been for us, a very busy and successful fundraising time.

Our Newsletter touches on a number of initiatives that the Foundation supports with the help of our generous sponsors and committed donors. Without such help, the research into the terrible disease that affects the fragile premature baby or the work of MotherSafe would not be so successful. I encourage you to read these articles in this Newsletter. I know you will appreciate the hard work that goes into achieving such wonderful medical and life-saving outcomes.

Fundraising can also be 'friend-raising' and our events give me the opportunity to meet our Foundation friends who continually support us. The 'Picnic' is our biggest annual event. As you can imagine, weather is always our principal concern when organising the Mother's Day Royal Picnic, and this year the sun smiled gloriously upon us allowing Mum to enjoy time in the Royal Pamper Lounge while the children were entertained to their heart's content! It certainly warmed my heart to see families spend quality time together on such a special day.

Nurses play a major role in caring for us, and the nurses in the Newborn Care Centre at the 'Royal' are extraordinary. This year, they saw the need, went into 'overdrive', and organised the 'Bubbles for Babies Ball'. A significant amount of money was raised that will help purchase a very special piece of equipment for the Newborn Intensive Care Unit. That is what I call total dedication and passion for your work.

There are so many stories I would love to share with you about our very special hospital, but of course, there just isn't the space in this newsletter! I can promise that the funds raised through the Foundation will purchase vital medical equipment, fund important research and ensure women throughout NSW receive up-to-date information that will keep them abreast of health education.

Thank you for helping us and happy reading...

Penelope Hess, Chief Executive
RHW Foundation

Cover story continued

there, it also quantifies it so it may show that the good bacteria are there but in too low numbers in a baby with NEC", says Steve.

As Kei says "conducting research for this condition is like doing a big jigsaw puzzle". There are many teams around the world studying this disease. "We can only do one piece at a time and no one team will find all of the answers. But what we can do is contribute to different pieces of the puzzle", says Kei.

Excitingly, the team has discovered some of those pieces already. One study compared full term babies that were breastfed with premature babies that didn't have NEC. They found huge deficiencies of bifido (good) bacteria in premature babies. "While term babies acquired bifido bacteria within one week of birth, we didn't detect bifido bacteria in premature babies, even after a few months", says Steve. And, adds Kei "there is more evidence to show that good bacteria has an important role in this condition and in gut health in very premature babies". In recent trials, premature babies receiving probiotics (good bacteria) "have already shown a reduction not only in NEC, but also in infection rates and mortality", says Kei. Basically

"the more healthy the gut, the less likely it is that it will be affected", he comments.

This is very encouraging, but the problem is, once again, they're not sure which bugs are the good ones for premature babies. That's what they're hoping to find out using the 454 sequencer. "Once we have that very detailed data, we can fill in the gaps, specifically what probiotics are needed to make up for the deficiency of these tiny babies", adds Steve. This would then complete another small piece of what is a very complex puzzle.

So you can see that despite these findings, there's still a long way to go. The RHW Foundation is committed to funding this vital research. This is being made possible through the ongoing support of the Madison Capaldi Research Fund, established in 2004 in memory of Madison Capaldi who died from NEC.

With a lot of hard work, many hours of research and continuous financial support, the NEC research team may be able to help remove one more obstacle in what is the precarious life of a premature baby.