



**Dr Gemma Figtree packs a lot into her day. She is both a Cardiologist at Royal North Shore Hospital and Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney. Then, as if that isn't enough, she is also a cardiac researcher and an academic supervisor of PhD students.**



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She loves all the work she does but she has a particular commitment to guiding her PhD students because she knows the sacrifices they make to pursue their ideas. She also understands how important scholarships are to these dedicated young researchers. She understands because she was once a PhD student herself, relying on a scholarship.

Gemma was at Oxford University, studying under a Rhodes Scholarship. It was a high pressure environment, as it is for the PhD students receiving the North Shore Heart Research Foundation PhD Scholarship.

“The Foundation Scholarships are absolutely essential to the PhD students who get them,” says Gemma, “These guys are giving up a lot to commit themselves to a career in high level research. The fact is, they could earn more money doing other things but they want to do this. They want to research and learn. They want to make a difference.”

Gemma is only too well aware that there aren't many funding options out there for PhD students who want to study cardiovascular health. The Foundation PhD Scholarship is one of very few, which

has led to a positive side benefit for the whole of Royal North Shore Hospital. “The Scholarship brings a lot of PhD students here,” she says, “That’s one reason why the hospital has such a vibrant community of researchers.”

This is an idea that Gemma feels very strongly about, the idea of a research community.

“It’s a very underappreciated concept. Yes, research can be a solitary task. But the best research comes out of a supportive environment. A team approach is certainly more efficient, but it also provides a melting pot for ideas. Our PhD students are from both pure science and medical backgrounds and during the course of their PhDs, this mixture provides many creative ideas and discoveries,” she says.

The long hours, the hard work, the lifestyle sacrifices, the financial constraints – there are so many reasons why someone might decide a PhD is too hard. Yet the applications for PhD Scholarships keep arriving at North Shore Heart Research Foundation and the students still have that fire in their eyes. And Gemma knows why.

“During the PhD program, each individual becomes an expert in their focussed research

Giving  to future generations

area. Their discoveries often make significant contributions to their fields.

It's such a satisfying feeling. Doing a PhD is the greatest opportunity to learn."

Each Scholarship granted by North Shore Heart Research Foundation is like opening another door to the future of cardiac research. With brilliant young minds applying themselves to one of Australia's

greatest health challenges – heart disease – anything is possible.

Yet this invaluable PhD Scholarship program, along with all the Foundation's other work, would simply not exist without the generous support of our family of supporters. Every dollar is important. Every dollar means we can say "yes" more often to people with drive, vision and a great idea.

### What is a PhD?

'PhD' means a Doctor of Philosophy from the Latin, philosophiae doctor. It is a post graduate academic degree awarded by universities. The reference to 'philosophy' is in the classical Greek sense of the word, meaning 'lover of wisdom'

The requirements for a PhD can vary. These are the requirements for a PhD through The University of Sydney Medical School, which has links with both Royal North Shore Hospital and North Shore Heart Research Foundation.

### Who can do a PhD?

Applicants should hold a relevant master's degree or a bachelor's degree with first or second class honours. An applicant may also be admitted after passing an examination to an equivalent standard.

### What is involved in doing a PhD?

The first step is to come up with an area of study or research that has not been previously explored. Every PhD student must have an academic supervisor who is appropriately skilled in their area of study. They must convince this supervisor that their project is unique, worthwhile and achievable.

Once they have their academic supervisor and the permission of the faculty to proceed, the real work begins.

There are no classes to attend as such. The goal is to produce an original project, thesis or dissertation that is worthy of appearing in a peer reviewed publication. The PhD student must also defend this work before a panel of expert examiners appointed by the university.

### How do PhD students support themselves during their studies?

PhDs are time intensive. Still, many students must take on work to pay the bills and a number of them struggle financially.

For this reason, most PhD students will apply for a scholarship which usually pays for bare living expenses only. The North Shore Heart Research Foundation PhD Scholarship is more generous than the government equivalent and is focussed on research that advances the cause of cardiac health.

### What do successful students get at the end of their studies?

Successful PhD students receive a Doctorate. They also have the knowledge and skills for a career in academia, research or broader specialist work in their chosen field.

## To make a donation today

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Fax: (02) 9436 0058

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