

RESEARCHERS

Meet Dr Ashleigh Dind

NEW FUNDING

Software to help
diagnosis

EDUCATION

Moving on with
Cardiac Rehab

We Life

NEWSLETTER – ISSUE 2, 2022


Heart
Research
Australia

Heart attack or heart inflammation?



Dr Ashleigh Dind, newest recipient of a HROz grant, uses advanced software to improve diagnosis and reduce unnecessary tests.

Giving **heart** to the future.

Facing the future with positivity



Hello – Finally we are opening up! It seems such a long time coming, and I hope you are enjoying moving on with life and any newfound freedoms.

Moving on from any major life event can be really challenging both mentally and physically, and none more so than if you are forced to face your mortality after a heart event.

This is where the amazing team from Cardiac Rehabilitation can help. On page 7 you can hear from RNSH “Nurse of the Year” Ann Kirkness on how Cardiac Rehab can help put patients on the road to recovery and restore confidence for the future.

On the page opposite you can also read Joe Benn’s story of his heart operation during COVID last year. Joe’s positivity is inspiring, as is his journey to fitness and health.

Plus, meet Dr Ashleigh Dind. This passionate cardiologist is one of the newest recipients of a HROz grant, and she talks about her journey to medicine and her desire to reduce her patient’s anxiety and give them confidence to look after their own health.

Plus, there’s much more. So, enjoy the read and here’s to positivity and a bright future.

Warm Regards,

Nicci Dent - CEO, Heart Research Australia

Meet the team

Hi, I’m Miriam and I’m the Direct Marketing Manager here at Heart Research Australia.

It’s now 20 years since I lost my beloved dad to a Heart Attack, and I still expect him to walk through the door any day. Never did I imagine that one day I would be privileged enough to work in an organisation that was helping other people and families avoid a similar fate.

Every day I am inspired. Whether it’s by talking to one of our selfless, generous donors about why they donate, or interviewing a patient about their story, or even talking to one of our incredible researchers about their projects – the positivity of all these people, and their passion to make a difference never fails to amaze me.

I really hope that when you read my interviews and stories you feel as uplifted and positive about the future as I do.

I am particularly passionate about getting the message out about heart research and awareness because I think had we had the knowledge and advancements in diagnosis and research 20 years ago, people like my dad may have lived much longer and got to meet and enjoy his grandchildren.

Nowadays, my family is living proof of how far we

have come due to better understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of heart conditions. I am fortunate to be a mum to three gorgeous young men (no bias!), one of whom has had a successful heart operation for Supraventricular Tachycardia (SVT) as a teenager, and we are blessed to still have my mum, who in her mid-80’s is still healthy and active - despite living with Atrial Fibrillation (AF) and an enlarged heart. To me, this is the difference research makes.

So, from my family to yours – thank you so much for being part of this incredible, caring, and positive community, who are making such a difference to the future of so many.

Miriam X



Miriam with her son and mother, both of whom have benefitted from advances in the treatment of heart conditions.

“You wouldn’t be dead for quids”

When we read this quote from 56-year Joe Benn’s post on our Heart Health Club private Facebook page – we thought he’d pretty much summed things up. We loved the down to earth approach of Joe and his positivity- so we felt compelled to tell his story, especially as it’s one many of us can relate to.

Joe started having some chest pains in August last year, but he said he was ‘doing the man thing and ignoring it’. That’s until he finally told his wife, who sent him to the GP. The GP said it sounded muscular, but Joe insisted the pain was on the inside of his chest not the outside. The GP advised him to call an ambulance if things got worse - which he did at 3am - 4 days later.

At the hospital Joe was told he had blitzed the results, when his ECG, bloods and blood pressure came back ok. However, his cardiologist had one last question “Do you have any family history of heart disease?” Not really having thought too much about it before, Joe realised his father, father’s uncle and grandmother had all died of heart attacks in their mid-50’s and there was history on his mum’s side as well. So, the cardiologist sent him for a CT scan, which showed four blockages in his coronary arteries, and a “stress MRI”, showed 2/3rds of his heart was not functioning correctly.

Joe ended up having a quadruple coronary artery bypass surgery.

For Joe it was a wake-up call. “My heart attack was down to family history and lifestyle. Lifestyle I can do something about”. In the weeks before his surgery Joe overhauled his lifestyle losing 15kg. Since his operation he has lost another 5kg.

Joe’s advice for anyone undergoing what he has, is to stay positive. “Try to maintain a positive mindset. Don’t be scared about the operation. The professionals looking after you, do this for a living, it’s their bread



A divided household! Joe, his wife Michelle and boys Matthew and Joseph.

and butter and they do this every day of the week.

But try and improve your health. If you are overweight, lose as much weight as you can. I attended cardiac rehab and started a walking plan, and I watch my diet now. Less salt and less foods high in cholesterol. Cardiac rehab got me back on track to being normal again by helping me ease back into the things I love, like hiking. Mindset can be a real issue post-surgery. I was lucky to have a cardiologist that checked in with me on my mental health, as well as my physical health.

It’s not easy, but at the end of the day I want to be healthy, I want to see my lads everyday – and you wouldn’t be dead for quids.”

Some helpful reference material:

Join Heart Research Australia’s Heart Health Club or private Facebook group to connect with others going through a similar journey: <https://www.heartresearch.com.au/heart-health-club/>

Read about Ann Kirkness, Nurse of the year and what Cardiac Rehab involves on page 7.

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Meet Dr Ashleigh Dind

Many of you may have seen Dr Ashleigh Dind in the media, helping to raise awareness of heart disease, in her role as a volunteer medical expert for Heart Research Australia. Aside from being a Cardiology imaging fellow at Prince of Wales Hospital, a researcher at Royal North Shore Hospital and a Cardiologist in Hornsby, she has represented the NSW Women's team and the Australian under 21's in Touch Football and is a mum to two young girls.

How did you come to medicine?

"My interest in sport and health really led me to medicine. I have always had an interest in the physiology of the body and had a drive to help people look after themselves and to get better.

Another pivotal moment was volunteering as a teenager, at Westmead Children's Hospital. I loved the work. I mainly played or fed the sick children while their parents or the staff had a break. It was a such a special time. But it was also eye opening and heart breaking to see what these families were going through. It made me appreciate my own life, but also ignited in me the desire to help others.

I also loved the collegiate environment in the hospital. To see teams of people coming together from all disciplines to work to improve their patients' outcomes was so inspiring and really made me want to work in a hospital.

But ultimately, I am a people person, so what I love most about medicine is working with my patients to inform and educate them as much as possible about what is happening to them, so hopefully I can reduce some of their anxiety and give them confidence that they can look after their health.

Why cardiology?

I really liked the many facets of cardiology, from the general study of cardiovascular disease to the "electrical" side (stimulation of the heart muscle), the "plumbing" (the heart arteries) and the heart muscle.

Being a practical person, who enjoys finding out how things work, I chose cardiac imaging as my subspeciality. I like to look at the structure of the heart and to use the imaging tools we have, to increase understanding of the way the heart works, so we can improve diagnosis and management of heart conditions.



What does the future hold for you?

It's pretty simple actually, my goal is to utilise the incredible advancements in technology to develop an even greater understanding of the heart so we can improve diagnosis and look after our patients better. And I sincerely thank Heart Research Australia supporters for your support which helps us get there – it's so appreciated.

To read more about Dr Dind's research and to listen to her TV interview on heart health go to:
www.heartresearch.com.au/redfeb-2022-media/

Heart attack or heart inflammation?

Dr Ashleigh Dind is the latest recipient of a Heart Research Australia grant. Dr Dind explains:

"My research is focussing on better understanding the differences between myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and myocardial infarction (commonly known as a heart attack)".

By identifying surrogate markers that can differentiate myocarditis from infarction, we can avoid any invasive and unnecessary testing which can increase the risk of bleeding, stroke or damage to the arteries.

That's why I am so grateful for the latest funding from Heart Research Australia, of the EchoInsight (strain

software. This software will help enable us to analyse the patients' MRIs (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and echos for abnormal heart strain measurements indicating dysfunction, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. Assessing for regional abnormalities instead of global abnormalities, which are often subtle, can show a distinct difference between patients with myocarditis and myocardial infarction – hopefully then avoiding invasive and unnecessary tests.

Thank you very much for your donations which make this funding possible.

COMMUNITY

A fitting tribute

In our last newsletter we brought you the sad news about the passing of Hamish Wilkinson, who was only 27 years' old when he suffered an aortic dissection and passed away devastating his family, friends and colleagues.

Recently some of the HROz team attended a beautiful memorial for a truly incredible man.

"In amongst our tears there is plenty to smile about, Hamish saw the joy in everything and it's a lesson for us all to remember. Never waste a moment to tell someone you love them."

- Helen Wilkinson (Hamish's mother)

Family and friends gathered to share loving stories of Hamish who loved a birthday celebration, a story, a chat, horses, and was larger than life.

Preferring to be 30 minutes early for work than one minute late, Hamish was incredibly devoted to his role at NSW Health earning the respect of all his colleagues.

His joy for life and ability to connect with anyone will leave a gaping hole within the community.

A memorial has been placed outside the NSW Health office in Hamish's special place where he loved to sit and enjoy the sunshine while greeting anyone who passed by and eating his lunch.



Friends and family place the memorial outside NSW Health

A truly beautiful and loving family who raised an incredible man have had their hearts broken irreparably. Every time we hear stories like this, our hearts break a little further. Whilst we're working as hard as we can to change the future of heart disease it just never seems fast enough. We are truly beyond grateful to the family, friends and colleagues of Hamish who have generously donated \$3,380 in his memory to Heart Research Australia to help our researchers search for breakthroughs into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease. Thank you for entrusting us to continue the legacy of Hamish. We are truly grateful and will continue to work as hard as we can to reduce the devastation heart disease causes families and the community.

Vale Hamish Wilkinson, you are one very loved man.

Community news

Finally, but slowly, HROz live events are starting up again, with a night of rock and a hit of golf. A big thanks to those who supported us.

ROCK ON!

On March 25th the band The Interceptors played to a crowd of 100+ people who ventured out to support live music and Heart Research Australia. The event, held at the Bridge Hotel, Rozelle was to support the fundraising efforts of our board member Brigid Shute and friend Rob Porcaro on their walk across the

Munga-Thirri - Simpson Desert conservation park and regional reserve.

Apart from being a really fun night of classic rock, **\$2,240** was raised adding to the **\$8,843** already raised for the walk – so thank you to all who came to support us!



HROz GOLF DAY!

Excitingly, our annual fundraising Golf Day has returned after a year COVID hiatus. Many thanks to the organisers Gary (Smokey) Dawson and Matthew Laverty from The Charity Challenge, who always hold such a fun and engaging event. We will bring you photos when we get them, but we must give a shout out to the wonderful companies who, despite challenging times, supported us by donating goods for raffles and auctions – thank you so much!



On the road to recovery...

Most people after a heart event are left floundering. "I never thought this would happen to me", is a common reaction. This is where Cardiac Rehabilitation comes in. The Cardiac Rehab team can include nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists and an exercise physiologist, who all work together to provide patients with a holistic approach to their recovery. They provide education on lifestyle, diet and exercise, psychological and emotional support and introduce patients to a supportive community of other people who are on the same journey. The aim is to help patients rebuild their confidence so they can move forward with their lives – sometimes in better ways than before their heart event.



Ann Kirkness RNSH "Nurse of the Year" and Cardiac Rehab specialist.

At Heart Research Australia we have been fortunate to work closely with Ann Kirkness who is a Clinical Nurse at the Cardiac Rehab at Royal North Shore Hospital. Recently awarded RNSH "Nurse of the Year," she has been working in Cardiac Rehab for 24 years.

Ann says "I feel very privileged to work in this environment. I work with such a great team, and there is so much positivity and energy amongst both the staff and patients. People want to come; they want to prioritise their health. It's great to be part of their recovery and help them on their journey back to good health.

There have been so many great advances in the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease over the last 20-30 years. Hospital stays are much shorter, so there seems to be an even greater need for the outpatient follow-up and support we can offer in Cardiac Rehab.

Our role is to help normalise the recovery process and help patients realise that they are not alone. Our focus is to help people realise that life can be as good, if not better than before, as they work towards a healthier lifestyle and discover the huge health benefits of exercise – both mental and physical. Our aim is not only to help people live longer but also to live well. It is really rewarding."

How Cardiac Rehab works

- Cardiac rehabilitation starts as soon as you go into hospital for a heart condition such as a heart attack, heart surgery or stenting.
- A member of the Cardiac Rehabilitation team will normally visit you on the ward to provide you with information about your condition, the treatment you've had and talk about your recovery, lifestyle and medications. You will then be given contact details of a Cardiac Rehabilitation program close to where you live so you can make contact soon after you go home.
- Your first appointment consists of an initial assessment where we help you to identify your individual needs and establish what might work best for you. This is usually done Face-to-Face, (but can be done by telehealth if time and/or distance is an issue).
- Comprehensive outpatient education programme (online or face to face) and exercises classes are available. Exercise sessions are tailored to meet individual needs and abilities. Lifestyle and risk factor management has a very important and integral role to play in terms of ongoing management and prevention. Recommended approaches can also include diet and exercise plans and referrals to other health professionals as needed.
- There are also social support groups which attendees can join and, in many cases, make life-long friends.

Helpful links:

To read more about Cardiac Rehab visit our website: <https://www.heartresearch.com.au/living-with-heart-diseases/cardiac-rehabilitation/>

Or to listen Ann talking about Cardiac Rehab on our webinar visit: <https://www.heartresearch.com.au/tea-with-the-experts-sept-2021-recording/>

For your nearest cardiac rehabilitation program visit the Australian Cardiovascular Health and Rehabilitation Association website for their Program Directory.

In Sydney, the North Shore Cardiovascular Education Centre provides exercise, education and support for people with heart disease, and those recovering from heart surgery or a heart event. Contact the team on 02 9463 1704.



A legacy for the future

We pay our respects and are deeply grateful to the following donors who chose to leave a gift in their Will to Heart Research Australia in the 21/22 financial year. Their legacy enables our researchers to progress their work which will improve outcomes for patients with heart disease. They will be remembered for having made a lasting impact on everyone who will benefit from research done today.

Thank you so much for your incredible donations to the following:



The Estates of the Late

Angelo Casella

Anita McKenzie

Athol Meers

Cynthia Carruthers

Edward Hamilton Jacob

Ian Russell Berry

John Edward Higgs

June F Weller

Late Nona Beale

Late Patricia Ann Clark

Sheila Gorman

Wendy McCormick

William David Evans

To help find the next breakthroughs for heart disease treatment - would you consider leaving a gift of 1% in your Will so we can continue live-saving heart research for future generations?

For more information, please go to: www.heartresearch.com.au/gifts-in-wills

Or contact: Diane van de Merwe on (02) 9436 0056 or bequest@heartresearch.com.au

Thank you so much! *Any legacy, small or large will have a positive impact on generations to come.*