



## **THE CONCORDIANS NEWSLETTER ISSUE 5 SPRING 2024**

*Bringing together past and present staff of the hospital to share and exchange experiences in a collegial, supportive and relaxed atmosphere.*

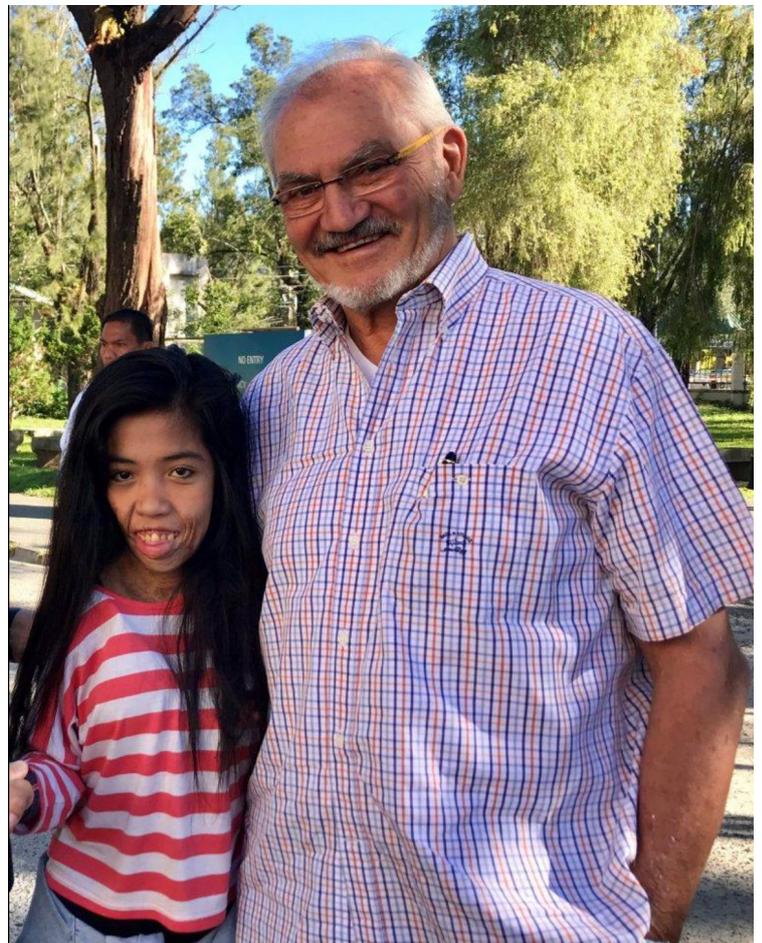
*Our Mission is to embrace and articulate the origins and history of the hospital, to promote its unique culture of communications and compassion and to nurture and support our members*

### **2024 Spring Meeting**

More than 60 members got together at the Concordians' Spring Meeting held at the Canada Bay Club on November 8th. Our guests included the new CEO of Sydney Local Health District, Deb Wilcox.

After a very pleasant meal Professor Peter Haertsch, our recently retired president spoke on his experience volunteering with Interplast Australia, which provides outreach plastic surgery for patients in the Pacific and South East Asia. Peter illustrated his talk with some case studies of patients he has helped including this young girl from the Philippines who suffered severe burns and who was flown to Concord for the expert treatment of our burns unit

Our next meeting will be the AGM in May next year.



## Membership

Following the incorporation of the Concordians, annual membership fees are due from December onwards. The fees remain a very low \$10 and members receive a newsletter four times a year and reduced prices for Concordian functions. We are currently seeking registration as a charity which will make any donations to the Concordians tax deductible. This will require a modification of the Concordians' constitution and will be discussed at the AGM in May.

Make sure that you are up to date and that we have latest details by visiting the new membership page at <https://www.theconcordians.com/membership/> The web site now accepts credit card payments, which makes renewal very easy.

**Encourage your friends and colleagues to join.**

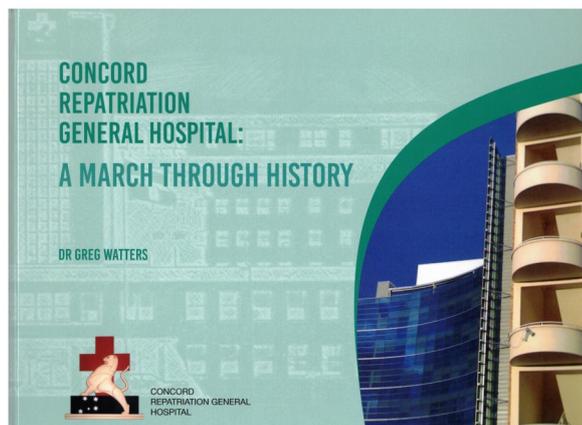
## Donations

Thanks to everyone who has been so generous with their time and money to help The Concordians during 2024. Your support is greatly appreciated

## Concord Repatriation General Hospital : A March through History

Some copies of the hospital history, which was commissioned by the Concordians, are still available. The book covers the history of the Hospital from its beginning as an Army camp, the 113th Australian General Hospital, through its time as a Repatriation hospital and up to the current day. It is richly illustrated with over 300 historic photographs.

Make sure you get copies for yourself and your friends before they run out. <https://www.theconcordians.com/book-publication/>.



## E M Lane Concordians' Museum

Plans for the re- opening of the museum at its new site in the old discharge lounge are continuing but have met some delays in fitting out the interior. The good news is that the museum should be open by Anzac Day 2025.

The museum has received a grant of \$5,500 from the National Library of Australia under the Community Heritage program. This will enable the museum's collection to be assessed for significance by the eminent historian and museum curator, Dr Fiona Starr

The Concordians are finalising a memorandum of understanding with SLHD to clarify areas of responsibilities, oversight and ownership of the museum collection.



If you are interested in becoming a museum volunteer, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Jan Bell on 0418410612 or at [theconcordians@outlook.com](mailto:theconcordians@outlook.com)

## Hospital History - The Red Cross Theatre

Tucked away in the hospital grounds lies the Red Cross Theatre, a building that is now largely derelict, but which was the centre of hospital life for many decades, .

In 1941, during the early stages of construction of the 113th Australian General Hospital, the Commonwealth Government requested that the Red Cross Society take responsibility for the “comfort and amusement” of patients, a responsibility that they fulfilled passionately until the hospital came under NSW Health control in 1992. The Society’s most permanent contribution to the hospital was the construction of a 500-seat theatre with a stage,



*Red Cross Theatre—shortly after construction*

dressing rooms and cinema equipment. Underneath the theatre was a recreation room with tea making equipment, piano, and billiards tables supplied by Red Cross’ donors. The complex also had a library with reading nooks and shelving for 10,000 books.

Through an arrangement with the movie theatre chains, new movies were shown in the theatre three or four times a week for staff and mobile patients. A tradition also developed that local and visiting celebrities volunteered to visit the

hospital and give free performances in the theatre as a contribution to the war effort and to show their good-will towards the 113th, and its patients . Perhaps the most famous visitor in the war years was Gracie Fields, an English actress, singer, and comedian, who performed in the theatre and visited the wards in June 1945.

Long after the war had ended and the 113th AGH had become RGH (C) the theatre remained a hub for patients and staff. During the Repatriation era, the theatre was managed by the Hospital Amenities officer, who during the 1950s was “Monty” Montague. Newly released movies continued to be shown two or three times a week with newsreels and documentaries at other times, but Monty’s passion was the staging of live shows. He was a former actor and a man of many talents who painted his own scenery and arranged props and lighting. He also used his show business connections to convince

## Hospital History - The Red Cross Theatre (cont.)

Sydney's professional and amateur theatre groups to donate their time for performances. Every Sunday evening there was a live concert, play or variety show with professional and amateur musical and drama societies, bands and sometimes university revues freely giving a performance. Until the 1980s The theatre also held hospital functions, staff dances and occasional staff reviews, which used the surprising talents of the staff to make sometimes pointed

observations of the hospital's personalities.



*The finale of the 1965 staff review "Bubbles and Beaux"*

However, the glory days of the theatre ended in 1958 when the Superintendent, Dr Taylor, argued that the concepts of "convalescence" and "rest cures", which resulted in extended periods of hospitalisation were outdated and the hospital should concentrate on treating

patients and discharging them as soon as possible. Dr Taylor claimed that some patients were seeking admission for minor ailments and then not wanting to go home. This was compounded by the sustenance payment ("susso") a welfare payment that Repatriation patients received as compensation for wages lost during their admission. There were also complaints that patients coming back to the wards after the performances were often unruly and disturbed the staff and other patients. Consequently Dr Taylor ordered that there would be no further live performances in the theatre. As compensation he ordered and had installed 7 television sets, then new to Australia, which were placed in the solariums of some of the wards.

This reduction in amenities outraged some of the patients and staff and led to a debate in parliament and an unanswered request by the RSL for a delegation to visit the Prime Minister, Mr Menzies. Passions ran so high that after the last performance on April 20, 1958, there was a brief struggle between a security guard and a press reporter who tried to interview Mr Frank Allden, the producer of the play "Simon and Laura" who had given an impassioned curtain speech arguing that "the show must go on". In the end none of the protests were effective and the regular Sunday concerts ended with Mr Allden's play

### **Hugh Carmalt, consultant surgeon, 2nd November**

(thoughts from David Gillett, Norman Janu, Mark Joseph, Gail Molland, Graham Dunn and Catherine Kennedy)

Hugh's early medical life saw him at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital as a resident and a registrar. He spent time at Darwin Base Hospital with rotations to Rabaul, Blacktown and the Children's Hospital. Hugh came to Concord as a Registrar, from RPA in the very early 80's. At that time Concord was a Repat hospital so a vastly different environment from the competitiveness of that teaching institution at the city end of Parramatta Road. It took time for Hugh to lose the angst that he came with, however as he settled in it was obvious that this was the beginning of what was to become a close and enduring partnership and personal friendship that was to span over four decades.

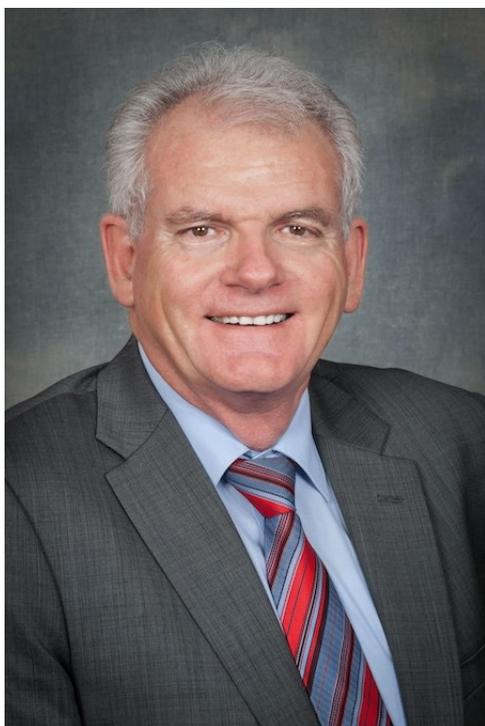
Hugh completed his training with time in England and Scotland and returned to Concord as a senior specialist surgeon. He had special interests in breast and gastric surgery as well as total parental nutrition. The later saw him lead the Nutrition Support service for many years, even though it led to almost daily battles with the formidable Dorell, the nurse administering TPN at Concord on Hugh's watch! Concurrently, he also held appointments at Canterbury and Breast Screen NSW.

In 1989 with David Gillett's tutelage, these two surgeons set up a specialist breast clinic in the cottage that adjoined the fledgling Strathfield Private Hospital (also known as The Concord Annex). With a nominal annual rental of \$1, a prehistoric bedside ultrasound, a dizzy blond secretary, a collocated pathology service providing instant FNA interpretation and a radiology component providing one site mammography and ultrasound (that also had the responsibility of providing a general radiology service to the hospital) a clinic that was to gain both national and international recognition was born. The Strathfield Breast Centre flourished over the next 32 years caring for nearly 10,000 patients with breast cancer and probably the same number again, with benign disease, high risk history's and those wanting regular surveillance in the private sector. Hugh's contribution to this Centre in the form of teaching to all levels of trainees, research, audit, leadership and inclusive support of all who made up the multidisciplinary team that was at the heart of The Strathfield Breast Centre, was extraordinary

Hugh was a gifted surgeon and clinician – not just in breast and endocrine surgery, but in all aspects of general surgery. He was much loved by all of his patients and possessed not only a superior technical skill but also confidence and compassion that brought comfort to many at times of great uncertainty and stress in their lives. He held incredibly high standards and believed every

## Vale

### Hugh Carmalt, consultant surgeon (cont.)



patient deserved the very best care. To some, he came across as stern and serious, but it was clear to those who knew him, that his intensity came from a deep, unwavering commitment to do what is best for his patients. He was a teacher, mentor and motivator and pushed his team – many of us here are better surgeons and caregivers because of his influence and example.

But Hugh was not without his quirks – we will fondly remember his unique habit, that when pointing out particular features on mammograms, or during surgery, he often did this, not with his index or pointer finger, but with his thumb! He was probably not even aware of this distinctive action, although, amongst some of his colleagues the term “atomic thumb” will rekindle warm memories of Hugh.

## Remembering our heritage

During November the hospital was associated with two ceremonies remembering the sacrifices of our armed forces, which were integral to the hospital’s foundation and early history.

On 3 November, SLHD Chief Executive Deb Wilcox and Hospital Acting General Manager Anthony Dombkins laid wreaths at a Kokoda Day ceremony at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway. This marked the 72nd anniversary of the freeing of the town of Kokoda from Japanese forces in 1942. The guests included three World War Two veterans who are now in their late 90s.

On 11 November a wreath laying ceremony was held at the Centenary Rose Garden and flagstaff in the front lawns to mark the 106th anniversary of the signing of the armistice that ended World War One.

## Contact Us

The Newsletter is a great way to let fellow Concordians know what is happening. Let us spread the word on any approaching reunions or personal milestones. We also welcome any personal reminiscences and photos of life at the hospital

Send your contribution to [theconcordians@outlook.com](mailto:theconcordians@outlook.com)

## Website

The Concordians website is regularly updated and can be found at: <https://www.theconcordians.com/>

**All the best, over Christmas and the New Year and until we meet again**

