

NSW TISSUE BANK NEWSLETTER

July 2024

FROM THE MANAGER



When I joined the Organ & Tissue Donation Service and was to hear my first donation story, I was taken aside politely and prepared for the power of these stories.

And they are powerful, each as moving and inspiring as the next. But they are stories told in parts, and I am grateful to have a vantage from where I get to see the remarkable, important and often unseen efforts conducted behind the scenes and between every donor and recipient that make these stories what they are: life changing.

We honour our donors with the many hours of care, effort and expertise that go into every donation gift and all of its stories.

So as you move through the stories and news in this edition, and learn of Maria's decline into darkness and her relief to meet our Medical Director Dr Con Petsoglou, or the impressive support for donation shown in 2023, I'd like for you to consider the enablers of these stories.

The Tissue Donor Coordinators responsible to find people like Maria a safe cornea by offering the opportunity to the families of our donors soon after their death.

The Procurement and Production Scientists who retrieve the generous gifts - holding the dignity of donors high - and who prepare and care for Maria's cornea for weeks ensuring that it is just right.

The Quality Team who monitor and tend every story under our care and declare that a priceless gift, a transplant like Maria's, is ready for release and ready to change someone else's life.

Many families will already have a story, or may know of someone who beat the odds and altered the course of their life through organ and tissue transplantation. These are powerful stories, the personal truths and connection they share are the core of organ and tissue donation support.

So please share your donation stories readily and take a moment to appreciate the quiet and careful work of our story enablers. We couldn't do this work without them.

Enjoy the issue

Sharn Dowsett
NSW Tissue Bank Manager

ON A CLEAR DAY



Sydney teacher Maria Boyd will never forget the palpable relief she felt as she walked through the doors of Sydney Eye Hospital and into the care of ophthalmologist Dr Con Petsoglou.

“Never before have I been so thankful for being in Australia,” Maria recalls “For Medicare, for Dr Petsoglou’s care, for our high level of health care. It was the first time in three months I felt held.”

That was in July 2021.

Maria and her husband Ben had been teaching in Vietnam when her world began to turn dark –quite literally. Maria developed a chronic infection in her left eye. COVID-19 began to cut its swathe around the world. International borders began to slam shut.

To make matters worse, Ben had to suddenly fly home to visit his father who had been diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer.

Not only was Maria’s eye infection difficult to treat –and well as excruciatingly painful – it was potentially fatal.

“Once the infection took hold, I understood why sailors had once committed suicide due to the pain,” she said.

Neither the hospital nor the eye clinic in Ho Chi Minh city had the equipment or skills to help, so Maria, who by this stage had grown “profoundly afraid” boarded a plane to Sydney.

Then a little miracle occurred. After months of treatment, staff at the Sydney Eye Hospital were able to curtail the infection, and Maria found herself being prepared for a corneal transplant.

The morning after the bandage was taken off will be etched indelibly in her mind for as long as she lives. “I opened my eyes. The vision had returned. It was blurry, but I could see,” she recalls.

“How could I possibly capture in words just how miraculous and life changing that is?” opened my eyes.

“Dr Petsoglou is not just a world expert in this very rare condition, he is the very best of human beings.”

Today, Maria is still slowly adjusting to her new vision; she just started pulling goggles on and swimming in her local ocean baths. She is working again, as a mentor to teachers and senior students.

“I’m deeply joyful and truly thankful for being to be in Australia where transplants are possible for every Australian,” she said.

“I am so deeply and profoundly grateful to be the recipient of this priceless gift,” Maria said. The corneal donation, she says, was “the most humane acts of giving –a timely reminder of how selfless and generous human beings can be.”

INCREASE IN DONATIONS



Last year saw an encouraging increase in organ and tissue donation and transplants.



In 2023, NSW Tissue Bank experienced commendable donation and transplantation activity, including


- A ten per cent increase in deceased eye donations, resulting in a three per cent increase in transplants, and enabling 27 corneas being provided to the New Zealand National Eye Bank for sight restoring surgery.
- The highest rate for progressing donor musculoskeletal tissue to manufacture, with 58 donation cases progressed, almost doubling the 2022 total of 31.
- A twenty four per cent increase in supply of amnion to meet increases in clinical demand.
- A thirty three per cent increase in femoral head donation compared to 2022, which is reflective of a near return to pre-COVID donation rates.

“Encouragingly we saw the highest rates of deceased organ, eye and tissue donation and transplantation since 2019”

said Dr Michael O’Leary, Co-State Medical Director of the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service.

The NSW Tissue Bank is proud to have facilitated 480 deceased donations, and 287 living donations. We are proud to have supplied 1473 allografts to Clinicians for the treatment of advanced disease and trauma and to have enabled countless more donation stories.

We extend our appreciation and gratitude to our generous donors and their families.



FOCUSING ON RESULTS

NSW surgeons have no preference for the age of the donor when it comes to corneas.

That's one of the important findings of a survey conducted by the NSW Tissue Bank's Aine O'Connor, Dr Chris Hodge and Dr Con Petsoglou. The corneal surgery practice survey, presented at the EBAANZ/BAA Meeting in Melbourne in March, also highlighted that our corneal surgeons hold the highest regards for donated corneal tissue when performing transplant surgery. Many corneal surgeons said they treat tissue with great respect, and that they always emphasise a donor's gift of sight to patients. They also said that easy access to research and surgical training tissue increases patient safety.

"The best results are obtained by continued attention to the smallest details"



In March, we had the privilege of attending the inaugural joint conference of EBAANZ (Eye Bank Association of Australia and New Zealand) and BAA (Biotherapeutics Association of Australia) Eye and Tissue Banking Conference.

The conference was hosted at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital by the Lions Eye Donation Service, the Bone Bank at Barwon Health, The Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria, and Australian Red Cross Lifeblood.

Topics ranged from donor criteria and ethical considerations of consent and the pivotal role of banks in research allocation. Discussions also extended to international development, collaborative efforts, and the evolving landscape of the field, offering insights into future therapies.

Shortly afterwards, staff attended the 39th Annual RANZCO Corneal Society Meeting. Professionally this gives Ophthalmologists the many benefits of collaborating without border on new and emerging techniques, and as banks gives us the contemporaneous information we need to help shape the profile of products into the future.

EYE TO THE FUTURE



MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MĀORI DONATION

There is a common misconception in New Zealand that Māori don't donate organs or tissues because of cultural beliefs around death. This assumption by staff may prevent them from offering the chance to donate.

These facts, presented by Maureen Watson, who works at the New Zealand National Eye Bank, were some of the many fascinating topics presented at the Annual Cornea Society & Eye Bank meeting in Melbourne recently.

Several qualitative studies found that attitudes within Māori are varied and that individual circumstances influence decisions as much as cultural values.

“There are both Māori eye donors and Māori corneal recipients in New Zealand and for the donations I have been involved with, the donor families were very proud that donation was possible and that they were helping others,” she said.

Maureen's recount and experience reminds us to challenge the development of any perception biases that could lead us astray from objectively sharing the opportunity for donation with families, and ensuring that the decision made, whatever the donation outcome, is an enduring and informed choice, reflective of the donor's intent in life.

MEET BIENCO'S NEW CEO

Danielle Fisher, the former General Manager at the NSW Organ and Tissue Donation Service, has taken the helm at BIENCO, the medical consortium manufacturing corneas from donated tissue.

Since stepping into the role, Danielle has been busy raising the profile of BIENCO, generating interest from several major companies. She recently attended The BIO 2024 Conference in San Diego, which was attended by more than 20,000 professionals in the biotechnology and science industry.



CALENDAR

28 JULY TO 4 AUGUST	DonateLife Week including Leaping Livers Lapping the Lagoon at Narrabeen Lake on 28 July
20-22 AUGUST	The annual BStreetSmart , which teaches school pupils about the potentially fatal dangers of driving
30 AUGUST	Jersey Day in honour of donor Nathan Gremmo
2-6 SEPTEMBER	Eye and Tissue Spotlight Week
22 OCTOBER	Saffron Day in honour of Deyaan Udani
27 OCTOBER	Newcastle Service of Remembrance
16 NOVEMBER	Sydney Service of Remembrance
17 NOVEMBER	Thank You Day



NSW Organ & Tissue
Donation Service

Incorporating:
NSW Bone Bank
Lions NSW Eye Bank
Australian Ocular Biobank

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