Ashmore Reef rescue effort
See story – page 10.
New hospital works and redevelopments are progressing well. The new Hedland Regional Resource Centre is taking shape, key appointments have been made to the Kalgoorlie Hospital redevelopment project, and the Albany Health Campus Community Reference Group has held its first meeting to discuss the new $135million purpose-built facility, one of the largest public hospital developments to be undertaken in regional WA. Broome Hospital works have picked up the pace in recent months and progress has been made towards the redevelopment of an innovative and comprehensive Busselton Health Campus. Urgent upgrades are being undertaken at the Nickol Bay Hospital with $10million funding from the Royalties for Regions Scheme.

Improving indigenous health is a priority for the WA Country Health Service, with indigenous people making up approximately ten per cent of the population living in regional and remote Western Australia. We continue to make important inroads in partnership with the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector to providing more culturally appropriate and effective health services. This partnership will help us to complement our services in communities for the benefit of Aboriginal people. In addition, we are strengthening our partnership with the Unity of First People of Australia to improve the health of indigenous communities in the Kimberley.

The teamwork and dedication of WA Country Health Service staff once again has been demonstrated with the extraordinary response to the dramatic incident off the northern coast near Ashmore Reef in April.

New initiatives to build and strengthen our workforce, promote leadership opportunities and encourage and support more indigenous workers to join country health services are also highlighted in this edition.

The outstanding achievements and personal stories of some of our staff again exemplify the shared commitment the WA Country Health Service has to ensuring the health and well-being of the people of regional Western Australia.

Regards,
Kim Snowball
Chief Executive Officer

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Working together for healthier indigenous communities

A partnership between the State Government and the not-for-profit organisation Unity of First People of Australia to improve the health of indigenous communities across the Kimberley has marked a new milestone.

Health Minister Dr Kim Hames, WA Country Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Kim Snowball and Unity of First People of Australia, President Ernie Bridge travelled to Derby recently to sign a Memorandum of Understanding cementing the partnership.

Dr Hames said both the WA Country Health Service and the Unity of First People of Australia have made improving Aboriginal health a priority.

“The WA Country Health Service has been working with the Unity of First People of Australia to tackle indigenous health issues in the Kimberley, particularly in relation to diabetes programs,” Dr Hames said.

The Minister announced that the State Government would provide $500,000 per annum for four years to expand the Unity of First People of Australia’s A Roadmap Towards Better Health Program – almost double the amount previously provided to the organisation.

A Roadmap Towards Better Health Program is a holistic wellness program, focusing on the promotion of healthy behaviours and lifestyle choices to decrease rates of chronic disease among Aboriginal people.

The program will build on the existing mobile diabetes management and care program already offered to several indigenous communities in the Kimberley, to incorporate a range of activities aimed at promoting lifestyle changes.

These include regular health assessments such as eye checks, improved access to primary health care including dental services, ante-natal education, cooking classes and nutrition programs such as the School Breakfast program run in collaboration with Foodbank, and the Community Store program which increases healthy food options.

Another important feature of the overall wellness approach is the provision of an Edible Garden program by EON Foundation that makes available a range of fresh fruit and vegetables to indigenous communities.

There will be an emphasis on exercise and sport programs with high profile footballers, basketball players and other athletes taking part in school and community activities.

In addition, support will be available under the Happy Family Project to work with communities to promote emotional and social well-being of individuals and families.

WA Country Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Kim Snowball said the additional State Government funding means the Roadmap Towards Better Health Program will reach more indigenous communities across the Kimberley.

“These communities now have additional opportunities to take on the responsibility for their own health by making healthy lifestyle changes, with the support of health professionals,” Mr Snowball said.

Unity of First People of Australia President, Ernie Bridge said the program represented a collaborative effort between his organisation, the WA Country Health Service, local providers and others to improve the prevention, control and management of lifestyle-related diseases for Aboriginal people.

“A Roadmap Towards Better Health Program represents a huge step forward in bringing key health professionals and indigenous communities together to work in partnership to improve Aboriginal health,” Mr Bridge said.

“I look forward to strengthening the working partnership between the Unity of First People of Australia and the WA Country Health Service over the next four years and beyond.”
Computer technology improves access to health services

Telehealth offers the prospect of better access to health services no matter where people live, using computer technology to improve patient care.

A number of new initiatives are being implemented throughout WA Country Health Service under the telehealth banner. One of these initiatives is tele-otology – a method of diagnosing ear disease by taking digital images of the eardrum.

Pilbara’s Population Health Director, Andrew Waters said this technology means people living in remote and rural areas of Western Australia can have swifter access to specialist doctors who may be based some distance from where they live.

“The digital images, hearing test results and a clinical history are sent in a secure report via email direct to the participating Ear, Nose and Throat specialist Dr Terry McManus in Perth, as part of the consultation process. Dr McManus can then email his assessment and advice back to the patient’s primary care provider,” Andrew said.

A tele-otology project has been running in the Pilbara region since 2008 and a team of experts from the University of Western Australia, School of Surgery’s Ear Sciences Centre, the Ear Science Institute Australia and the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health is carrying out a study into the costs and benefits.

Team member, Associate Professor Robert Eikelboom said the study aims to show that the use of tele-otology is effective in improving access to ear specialist services with positive outcomes for patients in remote areas.

“Chronic ear disease is up to four times higher in Aboriginal children living in rural and remote areas compared with non-Aboriginal children and this can lead to a number of social and educational issues,” he said.

“It is preventable, but reaching people in regional and remote areas has always proved more difficult. Our aim is to ultimately reduce the prevalence of Pilbara children with chronic ear disease and hearing loss.”

At its simplest, tele-otology is about speeding up communications with health professionals and cutting down on waiting and travel times for patients. It also means that doctors can spend less time travelling from one hospital or clinic to another, and more time doing clinical work.

“For some people in the Pilbara, it can take a couple of days to travel to and from a regional centre to access specialist services,” Andrew Waters said.

“This project is a major step towards providing the best possible care for all, wherever they live. These ‘virtual’ meetings bring a whole series of benefits for patients, the main one being accelerated and wider access to leading experts.”

Images from inside a child’s ear are recorded to send via email to the participating ENT specialist, Dr Terry McManus, in Perth for consultation.

Olive Joseph, Project Officer CUCRH, uses video-otoscopy equipment at Yandeyarra School, 145kms south-west of Port Hedland.
Pilot program aims to ‘close the gap’

An innovative project has been launched to forge stronger links between allied health services and Aboriginal communities in remote Western Australia.

The WA Country Health Service’s commitment to ‘closing the gap’ and improving the health of indigenous Western Australians is being demonstrated through the introduction of Aboriginal Allied Health Assistants.

The Kimberley Allied Health Service covers an area of more than 100,000 km² visiting approximately 40 remote Aboriginal communities.

WA Country Health Service Kimberley Project Officer Susan Witt says the new role being piloted in Derby, builds on already close ties to better meet the health needs of Aboriginal people.

“Aboriginal Allied Health Assistants not only provide therapy support, but also assist by engaging with the local community and patients to provide culturally respectful services,” Susan said.

“This means services for the people who need them are delivered more quickly and effectively.

“Thanks to the support of our Aboriginal Allied Health Assistants, Shirley-Ann McCasker, Richard Webb and Tamara Gallagher, we have been able to break down a number of barriers associated with cross cultural work,” Susan explained.

“They have helped us increase the quality and access to our services, support better communication with our Aboriginal clients and communities and provide cultural mentoring and support for our therapists.

“As a result, we have seen more consistency in our service, reduced missed appointments and implemented greater flexibility and culturally effective services.”

Aboriginal Allied Health Assistant Richard Webb said his new role has opened up a lot of options and made the team more aware of a range of things they can do better to benefit Aboriginal communities.

“I get a lot of satisfaction out of knowing that each day is a little bit different and I’m a small part of a bigger team which is helping overall service and delivery become more effective,” Richard said.

The project, developed collaboratively by the WA Country Health Service, the Office of Aboriginal Health, Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health and the Disability Service Commission, is currently being rolled out to other sites across country WA.
A young Corrigin nursing student has beaten stiff competition to win the National Rural Health Alliance 2009 Des Murray Scholarship for her contribution to rural and remote health in her community.

Twenty-nine year old Caroline Rogers said the scholarship, awarded bi-annually to enable a young person to attend the National Rural Health Conference, provided a wonderful opportunity to broaden her understanding of the health system.

With the scholarship covering the cost of her registration, airfare and accommodation, Caroline was able to attend the 10th National Rural Health Conference held in Cairns in May.

Caroline said the conference provided a fantastic networking opportunity and allowed her to meet people who worked across the health spectrum.

“It was very interesting to hear from people higher up in their organisation and the processes involved in making changes to the health system,” she said.

And there is an inspirational story behind the young nursing student’s achievements.

It was while working as a Patient Services Assistant at her local Corrigin District Hospital that Caroline was inspired to pursue a career in nursing.

“I was caring for a lady who was a patient at the hospital. She had asked me if I would help her shower and clean her house as she was terminally ill with a brain tumour.

While I was caring for her, she very kindly offered to pay for my nursing tuition. I had never given nursing a thought but she was convinced that I would be good at it and she provided me with the opportunity.”

When the patient passed away in 2003, her wishes to see Caroline complete her nursing degree were shared by her husband.

Now, as a single mum to three-year-old Nathan and Bella aged two, Caroline is completing her course through distant learning with the Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory.

Caroline’s sponsor not only pays for each nursing unit, but also any flights she needs to Alice Springs when she is required to attend the University, as well as accommodation during her stay.

“I have been doing the course part-time since 2005 and I am really enjoying it, although fitting it all in is often difficult with two small children, so I save all my study time for when the kids go to bed.

“It’s the practical element which is the hardest challenge as I am away from the kids for four weeks at a time and only get home at the weekends.”

However, Caroline is already thinking of her next challenge and is currently taking flying lessons from her dad with a view to joining the Royal Flying Doctors Service once she has completed her nursing training.

“I want to build my career helping people in the bush. I like the peace and quiet, I like the people, everybody knows you in a small town and the community spirit is very generous.”

Corrigin District Hospital’s Director of Nursing, Pam Keenan, has mentored Caroline throughout her course and has nothing but praise for the dedication shown by the young mum.

“Caroline has worked extremely hard to achieve her nursing degree and I am delighted that she was awarded the 2009 Des Murray Scholarship as she thoroughly deserved it.

“Charles Darwin University has said Caroline is one of the best students they have had, with her consistently high marks throughout her course and that, combined with her caring nature, will make her an excellent nurse.”
Nurse Rotational Programs entry is finalist for Premier’s Award

An innovative range of recruitment programs enticing nurses to work in country WA has been named as a finalist for a Premier’s Award.

Careers with Adventure – WA Country Health Service Rotational Nursing Programs, is one of three finalists in the Improving Government category.

The Nurse Rotational Programs entry is also eligible to win the overall Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management. Over 60 projects from across the public sector submitted nominations for the Premier’s Awards this year.

The Nursing and Midwifery Rotational Programs offer nurses the opportunity to experience rural health care in a variety of settings over a 12-month rotation period.

Nurses are offered a range of clinical experiences and professional development and are provided with an opportunity to learn about the reality of rural and remote practice, where knowledge and understanding of primary health care and Aboriginal health care is developed.

There are currently four rotational programs being offered:

- Ocean to Outback – for registered nurses level 1.2;
- Country to Coast – for registered nurses level 1.3 and above;
- Crocs to Rocks – for enrolled nurses; and
- Careers with Adventure – for more senior registered nurses.

Since the establishment of the programs in 2006, 91 nurses from across WA, Australia and internationally have commenced a nursing rotational program with 27 per cent of previous participants now employed as permanent WA Country Health Service staff members.

Executive Director of Nursing, Karen Bradley said her team were very excited to be named as finalists for the award.

“The rotational nursing programs have been hugely successful in attracting and recruiting more nursing staff to the WA Country Health Service by providing them with the experience of working in hospitals all over the State,” Ms Bradley said.

“This has led to some of them deciding to stay and work permanently in communities across country WA where there are often severe shortages of staff and long term-vacancies.

“We’re attracting nurses from interstate and overseas, including Queensland, New South Wales and for the first time, New Zealand, which is very exciting.”

Program Manager, Lisa Natoli said when surveyed, 83 per cent of nurses agreed that the rotation programs had positively influenced their desire to work in rural areas.

“The programs have been formally evaluated and show a reduction in the use of agency staff resulting in significant cost savings and the maintenance of service delivery in rural and remote locations due to the increased numbers of nurses available,” Lisa said.

The winners of the Premier’s Awards will be announced at a twilight ceremony hosted by the Premier on 28 October.

Recruits for the Ocean to Outback rotational program, one of the Nurse Rotational Programs named as a finalist for a Premier’s Award.
Hospital capital works update

Albany Health Campus

Development of the Albany Health Campus is progressing well with a Community Reference Group established and a new website launched.

The newly formed Community Reference Group, comprising key stakeholders and community representatives, met for the first time in Albany on July 29. The Group will be an important two-way link to interest groups and the Great Southern community.

A fast-track approach with early contractor involvement will be used to construct the new facility, enabling the contracted builder to be involved in the design process. This represents a departure from traditional procurement methods where design work is completed prior to seeking tenders for construction work. A contractor will be appointed following a tender process expected to be undertaken in 2010.

Expressions of interest have been advertised seeking private sector interest in delivering services from the new Albany Health Campus, including potential for contributing capital funds towards the building cost.

The development of the Albany Health Campus is one of the biggest public hospital developments ever undertaken in regional Western Australia. The $135million purpose built facility will provide modern and expanded services to enhance the quality of patient care and safety for residents of the Great Southern region.

For the latest information about the development of the Albany Health Campus please visit the web site at www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/albanyhealthcampus

Denmark Health Service

The new $18million Denmark Health Service was officially opened in early February this year.

The new complex provides health and aged care in a modern purpose-built facility, which has an expanded emergency department with modern x-ray equipment and specialised trauma care facilities.

There are 11 residential aged care beds, one respite bed and six acute beds, with the capacity to open 4 more acute beds and 10 more residential aged-care beds in order to meet the future needs of the town.

Kalgoorlie Hospital redevelopment

Key appointments have been made to ensure the $55.8million redevelopment of Kalgoorlie Hospital is delivered within the fastest possible time frame.

NS Projects have been appointed project managers of the redevelopment with Donald Cant Watts Corke appointed as cost manager.

Both positions will work closely with the Project Control Group and architects Peter Hunt & Lyons Architects to ensure the quality of the project and that it is delivered on time and within budget.

Broome Hospital

The redevelopment of Broome Hospital has significantly picked up the pace in recent months, with the new Emergency Department triage area and patient waiting area now completed.

Work on the new Central Sterilisation Supply Department and new theatres, new inpatient wing and High Dependency Unit are progressing on schedule.
The new entrance to the Broome Hospital.

Structural steel work has also been put in place for the new administration block and work has begun on a new car park area.

The Federal Government has confirmed that it will fund a new paediatrics ward at Broome Hospital.

The location of the paediatrics ward in the centre of the hospital site means that work will be carried out at the same time as construction of the mental health unit, with work on both facilities to start in mid-2010 for completion in 2011.

Hedland Hospital

Construction of the $138.4 million Hedland Regional Resource Centre is on target for completion in August 2010.

The majority of external steel framing is completed and work has started on the internal framing works.

About 50 staff members recently attended a transition workshop to consider how best to approach the move to the new facility and ensure it proceeds as smoothly as possible.

Following a tender process well-regarded local artists Arif Satar and Audrey Fernandes-Satar have been selected to oversee work on a design feature for the huge pergola structure that will span the courtyard of the new Hedland Regional Resource Centre.

Busselton Hospital update

Negotiations are to commence with two private health organisations to develop an innovative and comprehensive Busselton Health Campus, signaling an important step forward in the progress of the $77.4 million redevelopment.

Following an expression of interest called late last year, well-regarded health care providers St John of God Health Care Inc and The St Ives Group have been selected to work with the State to achieve the best solution for the health campus to meet the needs of the Busselton community and surrounding areas.

The redeveloped Busselton Health Campus will provide the people of Busselton with access to ‘seamless health care’ – a comprehensive range of integrated health services, including private acute care and aged care services, located on a single ‘one stop shop’ campus.

Batemann Grundmann Architects have been appointed as the Site Master Planning Architects and will be working closely with the WA Country Health Service, St John of God Health Care Inc and The St Ives Group to design the campus.
Dramatic incident off north-west coast testament to extraordinary teamwork

The dramatic rescue and successful evacuation of casualties at Ashmore Reef in April highlighted the dedication and teamwork of WA Country Health Service staff across the State’s north-west, who overcame extraordinary challenges to provide frontline emergency care.

Within an hour of the incident off the north-west coast on April 16, the Kimberley Emergency Operations Centre was set up in the Broome Hospital boardroom to coordinate the regional response to the crisis, requiring senior management and senior clinical input over three days.

The rescue and evacuation of the injured was a complex operation in a remote part of northern WA, involving multi-agency collaboration across State and Commonwealth jurisdictions, including the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Defence Force and the Royal Flying Doctor Service as well as staff from Broome, Derby, Port Hedland, Darwin and Perth hospitals.

While the Department of Health led State Emergency Operations Centre oversaw the logistics at a state and national level, hospital teams across the Kimberley quickly prepared to receive the anticipated large number of casualties.

A field medical team and equipment from Broome hospital was flown by long-range helicopter in the afternoon to the very remote Mitchell plateau (Truscott Air Base) (see break-out story).

They were joined by a medical team from Derby Regional Hospital, an RFDS team of six, a medical team of eight from Royal Darwin Hospital and medical nursing support staff from the Australian Defence Force.

Meanwhile, Broome Hospital was reinforced by the arrival of medical, nursing and a paramedic team from the Pilbara and a Perth surgical and burns team. Back-up was also provided by all WA Country Health Service Kimberley services with clinical and non-clinical support from Derby and Kununurra on stand-by ready to take patients if needed.

An exhausted Broome team take a well-earned break after working through the night to help casualties: (from left) Jo-Ann Riley RN, Glenn Imber RN, Dr Gavin Osgarby and Dr David Hailes.
Dr Iain Hague, Director of Medical Services, Kimberley said extra staff were drafted in and Broome Hospital was put on alert in anticipation of the large number of casualties as the massive airlift swung into action 600kms north of Broome. As the day progressed, it became obvious that Truscott airfield was operating as the triage area for assessment and transfer to appropriate facilities.

“Later in the day we were told that we were receiving up to nine patients, but following triage at Truscott Air Base these patients were flown directly to the Royal Darwin Hospital or to Royal Perth Hospital,” Dr Hague said.

“However, a Royal Flying Doctor Service flight was required to stop in Derby and then transferred a patient to Broome in the early hours of the morning for treatment by the visiting Royal Perth Hospital burns team.

Dr David Hailes was one of a team of four medical staff from Broome Regional Hospital who were the first to arrive at Truscott Air Base and provide medical assistance to casualties on board the FPSO Front Puffin. Here he gives a first hand account of the dramatic day.

“I was called in to Broome Regional Hospital by Dr Iain Hague, Director of Medical Services at about 7:30 in the morning along with Dr Gavin Osgarby and registered nurses Jo-ann Riley and Glen Imber.

We were flown up to Truscott Air Base on a chartered helicopter from Broome and were the first medical team to arrive. We set about converting the air hangar into a casualty clearing station and were soon joined by Dr Anil Pothapu and enrolled nurse Andi Taylor from Derby Regional Hospital, an RFDS team of six, a medical team of eight from Royal Darwin Hospital and medical nursing support staff from the Australian Defence Force.

The RFDS team of three doctors and three nurses were the first to be ferried by helicopter out to the Front Puffin rig. The casualties had been taken to the rig by a Royal Australian Navy ship. Four from that team stayed on the rig, while an RFDS doctor and nurse flew back to Truscott with the first casualties.

We (the Broome team and a doctor from the Royal Darwin Hospital) flew out to the rig on the second helicopter shuttle run at around 4pm. We triaged the casualties, providing intravenous fluids, pain relief and applying first aid burns dressings. It was very hot and humid on the ship and we were working in fairly basic conditions. We did the best we could with what we had. There were some things that were pretty tricky, like getting patients in stretchers up the stairs of the rig and onto the helipad.

We saw the next group of patients off the rig, accompanied by the remaining RFDS doctor and nurse. Finally, at about 1am, we were able to leave the rig with the last group of patients.

It was a remarkable day and night. The help we received from the guys on the Front Puffin was amazing as was the initial triage work done by the doctor on board the Royal Australian Navy vessel. The general goodwill and cooperation between all the services and medical personnel was outstanding.”

First helicopter about to leave Front Puffin with casualties.
Rescue package for Nickol Bay Hospital

Plans have been put in place to ensure Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha continues to meet the needs of local residents now and into the future.

Earlier this year, the State Government unveiled a $10million rescue package for urgent health service upgrades to the hospital using cash from the Royalties for Regions Scheme.

Health Minister Dr Kim Hames announced the plans, which include $1million to develop a blueprint for the future needs of the hospital and the West Pilbara region.

Regional Director Tina Chinery said Nickol Bay Hospital was long overdue for major redevelopment to meet changing population needs. She said the package includes $7million for much needed staff accommodation.

“There have been a number of difficulties in attracting and retaining staff exacerbated by the high housing and rental costs in Karratha,” Tina said.

“We need to provide appropriate staff accommodation as soon as possible to ensure the local population continues to have access to top quality health services and this financial commitment has allowed us to research housing options for our staff.”

Tina said $2million had also been earmarked to strengthen obstetric and gynaecological services. She said hospital staff have been closely involved in developing a plan to increase obstetric services, modernise the delivery suite and obstetric equipment.

“The long-term goal is to provide a full-time specialist obstetrician/gynaecologist at the hospital with responsibility for providing and supporting obstetric and gynaecology services at Nickol Bay and surrounding West Pilbara towns,” she said.

“Rotations and back-up support from King Edward Memorial Hospital is also being pursued along with the development of a community-focused midwifery program that will enhance pre-pregnancy, ante-natal and post-natal services.”

There has been extraordinary growth in the region and the population in the West Pilbara is expected to increase by more than 21 percent by 2016. A further $1million is being used to develop a blueprint for the future needs of the hospital in order to meet this growing demand.

“So far we have reviewed the data showing what people are presenting to the hospital for as well as population health trends, Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PAT) use and health issues,” Tina said.

“This rescue package is a great opportunity to put in place plans to ensure the hospital meets the needs of local residents and surrounding towns that make up West Pilbara,” Tina said.

“We are now developing a community and stakeholder consultation plan to make sure that we hear from the people of Karratha and surrounding towns about what they want to see provided in the future.”

Trauma trolleys streamline patient care

Nickol Bay hospital has received a generous donation of almost $20,000 to enhance care for trauma patients.

The cash was raised by workers at the Karratha Gas Plant during a recent safety incentive campaign and was used to purchase three specialist trauma trolleys for the hospital’s Emergency Department.

Acting District Director of Nursing, Kylie Bosich said the donation was very much appreciated.

“We are very grateful for this kind donation which will provide more streamlined care for patients requiring emergency treatment.”

“The trolleys have a special slot for x-ray cassettes to be placed which allows patients to remain on them when having their x-rays taken.

“This makes it easier for staff who have to transport patients between departments as once they are on the trolley they generally don’t have to be moved again.”

‘Trolley Dollies’ test drive one of the new trolleys – Back row: Kylie Bosich, Acting District Director of Nursing; Rhonda Webb, Emergency Department RN; Front row: Nicki Corden, Ward CN and Laura Buchanan, Emergency Department RN.
Telethon cash provides welcome equipment boost

Babies and children in regional hospitals are set to benefit from a range of new equipment thanks to grants totalling almost half a million dollars from the Telethon Trust.

WA Country Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Kim Snowball said this significant $470,273 investment would greatly benefit both patients and staff across WA country hospitals.

“The WA Country Health Service handles as many births as King Edward Memorial Hospital, the State’s major maternity hospital, so we are extremely grateful for the generous support we have received from the Telethon Trust,” Mr Snowball said.

“The $168,180 purchase of 10 telemetry units for foetal monitors – cordless devices used to monitor the unborn child during labour – will ensure mothers have increased mobility which can help in managing labour pain,” Mr Snowball said.

The units are being installed in hospitals at Northam, Broome, Kununurra, Derby, Karratha, Port Hedland, Geraldton, Carnarvon, Katanning and Albany.

Eight neonatal monitors costing $280,564 are being installed in special care nurseries at Bunbury, Port Hedland, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Narrogin, Albany and Broome. The monitors help with early identification of babies who are most at risk to ensure a quick transfer to Perth for specialist care, if necessary.

“Grant funding of $21,528 has been used to buy 72 portable DVD players, which will help ease the boredom of long stays in hospital for children and can also be used by family members to view educational resources,” Mr Snowball said.

Scholarship win for cancer support worker

‘I’m sorry you have cancer,’ the five words that everyone dreads.

A cancer diagnosis can be devastating and can affect more than just physical health – it can place an added burden with practical issues such as finances, transport and home help.

Helping support those diagnosed is Esperance Community Health Cancer Support Coordinator Kym Sullivan. Jointly funded by Cancer Council WA and the WA Country Health Service, Kym offers much needed emotional, social and practical support to people affected by cancer and their carers.

Inspired by the strength and resilience of many of her clients, Kym is determined to continually improve her knowledge and skills in a bid to provide the best possible care that she can.

And it is through this determination that she has become one of 44 applicants across Australia to win a national scholarship to undertake the Graduate Certificate in Breast Care Nursing at La Trobe University.

“Around one third of my clients are being treated for breast cancer and through my experiences with these women I was keen to increase my education in this area,” she explained.

Kym had placements in several breast cancer treatment centres in Perth and this inspired her to apply for the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre scholarship funded by the Polo Ralph Lauren Pink Pony Campaign.

“Scholarships are offered to health professionals who are keen to further their skills in the support of women with breast cancer. I feel that by furthering my skills and professional knowledge in this area I can offer a service to my clients that will be of enormous benefit,” Kym said.
Pilbara indigenous mentoring program brings winds of change

There’s a change in the wind in the Pilbara delivering a new breed of Aboriginal health leaders like Rodney Monaghan.

Rodney is a senior health worker and enrolled nurse at Port Hedland Regional Hospital’s renal unit, but lately he has swapped his scrubs for business shirts and ties in his new role as Aboriginal Health Officer.

He’s the first person to take part in a new indigenous leadership and mentoring program developed for the Pilbara region to provide mentorship for Aboriginal staff and encourage them towards a career in health management.

Pilbara Regional Director, Tina Chinery said the program is a way to open career pathways that previously didn’t exist for Aboriginal health workers.

“We identified that we didn’t have a lot of Aboriginal health leaders in the Pilbara and that we needed to do more to encourage Aboriginal staff towards a career as a leader/manager,” Tina said.

“So we developed a program to help broaden their understanding of health services outside of clinical care and into management roles, utilising the mentoring skills of our Population Health Aboriginal Health Coordinator, Ollie Smith.”

Tina said the new program is helping Rodney to hone his management skills by on-the-job role modelling, attending high-level meetings and working with other government agencies.

Rodney was recently in Perth, shadowing Area Director of Aboriginal Health, Kevin Cox, attending high level meetings with other government agencies and working with WA Country Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Kim Snowball. Back in the Pilbara, he attended the Regional Executive meeting and the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Forum.

“Rodney has all the leadership qualities we are looking for. He is an inspiration to many people in the community and has the determination to achieve whatever goals he sets himself,” Tina said.

“The indigenous leadership and mentoring program highlights how much the WA Country Health Service values the input of people like Rodney and Ollie.

“Through their hard work and leadership there is a growing respect for Aboriginal health workers in the region.
“There is definitely a change in the wind!” Tina said.

Born and bred in the Pilbara, Rodney trained as an Aboriginal health worker in the 1980s and has worked at Port Hedland Regional hospital in the renal unit for the past 10 years.

“I wanted to do more with my career, I had gone as far as I could go as an Aboriginal health worker, so I decided to do enrolled nurse training in 2005,” Rodney said.

At that stage, Rodney was in his late thirties and said it was a difficult decision to make, but he’s glad he stuck to it. Last year he achieved his advanced skills enrolled nursing qualifications and this year he will be doing the conversion to registered nurse.

“I really notice how much more respect I get as a nurse,” Rodney said. “I want to encourage other Aboriginal health workers to do their nurse training and move along their career path. We need to close the gap and this is one way we can achieve it.”

Rodney was delighted when he was approached to join the mentoring program. For the past six weeks he’s been learning the ropes, including a trip to Perth to meet stakeholders, management and staff at the WA Country Health Service and the Office of Aboriginal Health.

His new role as Aboriginal Health Officer includes recruitment of indigenous staff, managing health workers, implementing training programs and reviewing job description forms to make them more relevant to the job. But he still pulls on the scrubs and works part-time in the renal unit.

“My ultimate goal is to move into indigenous health management,” Rodney proudly says.

“I’ve done the groundwork, done the clinical work and I know how it all works. I’ll be there for the long term, which is very important for my community.”

Rodney has two daughters, aged 18 and 19 and a 23-year-old son. His daughters both had roles in the film Rabbit Proof Fence and his son works in mining.

“My kids couldn’t believe their dad became a nurse! Now they can’t believe he’s in management. I get a lot of ribbing about wearing a shirt and tie these days!”

Rodney is proud to be a role model for other indigenous health staff and people in his community. He believes if others step up to the plate and do the extra training, they will earn respect.

“There are other Aboriginal health workers who are currently doing their enrolled nurse training. We want to close the gap and increase the number of indigenous workers in the Pilbara region,” he said.

“One way we help is to provide Aboriginal people with assistance to complete job applications for the Health Department. They can come and do a three-month trial to see if they like the work, then get assistance with applying for the job on-line.”

Rodney said they are also really keen to build the indigenous health management team in the Pilbara.

“Change is coming, and it has to come from management. We are there to push it. We don’t want to be token black fellas in management. We are getting results.”

Rodney in scrubs at the renal unit at Port Hedland Regional Hospital with colleagues, Maila Fanning CN (left) and June Councillor EN.
Health students encouraged to go ‘Outback and Beyond’!

WA Country Health Service is continually striving to build a skilled, stable and motivated workforce that meets the needs of the diverse country population.

With this in mind, staff at Allied Health are focusing their attention on the workforce of the future, encouraging health students to consider ‘going rural’ as part of their continued studies and post-graduation.

Allied Health Program Manager, Suzanne Spitz said every year WA Country Health Service staff attend a number of career expos and information sessions for nurses, doctors and allied health professionals.

Colleague and Nursing Workforce Development Program Manager, Sue Hennessey said a focus of many of the expos they attend is to provide information to graduating students on job opportunities in country areas, application processes and development programs that are available to support transition into the workforce.

“The expos are a great way to reach students earlier in their studies. It’s well recognised that students who have gone to the country as part of their studies are more likely to return once they have graduated.

South-West Health Campus celebrates in style

There was dining and dancing in Bunbury in March when the South-West Health Campus celebrated its 10th anniversary.

A week of events were held to commemorate the significant milestone for the unique combined facility, including a staff dinner/dance, staff barbecue, a formal afternoon tea, a public open day and a black tie ball.

Bunbury Hospital Operations Manager, Susan Kay said the anniversary presented an opportunity to showcase the health campus to the community and celebrate the successes of its first 10 years.

“The South-West Health Campus is a unique facility in a rapidly growing region, combining public (WA Country Health Service South-West) and private (St John of God Bunbury) health services,” Susan said.

“As a result of this arrangement, the joint South-West Health Campus can boast 120 private and 133 public beds and consequently we are more successful in attracting clinical specialists who are not always available in regional centres.

“Our facility sharing arrangement has allowed not only a greater range of services to be provided but also allows maintenance, catering and security services among others to be shared, which benefits both organisations.”

Susan said in recent years, capital works upgrades worth almost $15million and the addition of dental services to the campus have also benefited the south-west community.

“We’ve come a long way in 10 years and celebrating the anniversary was a great way of acknowledging the role of staff and the community in the success of the South-West Health Campus.”
Big push for new medical imaging accreditation scheme

Patients accessing medical imaging facilities can be reassured they are benefiting from safe, high quality services thanks to a new national accreditation scheme.

WA Country Health Service is one of the first health providers nationally to sign up to the scheme, developed by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR) and the National Association of Testing Authorities Version 9 Standards (NATA), and is reaping the rewards.

Under the scheme, Medicare benefits will now only be payable when a radiology service is provided from an accredited practice, allowing patients to be confident that they are receiving safe, quality radiology services.

Despite the enormous implications in rolling out the scheme across the State, the WA Country Health Service sees the accreditation as an extra feather in its cap in the continued drive to provide top quality services for its patients.

Teresa Ong, Medical Imaging Consultant, said that from 1 July last year it became mandatory for all medical imaging facilities wishing to seek Medicare benefits, to gain accreditation or be registered with an approved accreditation provider by July 2010.

“This loomed as a massive task for the WA Country Health Service with over 70 sites across the State requiring accreditation under the scheme,” Teresa said.

“So far more than 16 sites have undergone the RANZCR/NATA Version 9 Standards accreditation thanks primarily to the dedication and hard work of the staff involved and we are continuing to work closely with the remaining sites to ensure they reach the same goal.

“This has significantly increased the workload of staff providing these valuable services but I am encouraged by how they have embraced the opportunity to work together to achieve this recognition while maintaining quality services.”

Teresa said the development of accreditation manuals for medical imaging was particularly important for WA Country Health Service staff.

“Having the accredited operation manuals will make their jobs better defined, safer and easier.”

New partnership to benefit rural children and their families

Rural children with, or at risk of, developmental delays or disorders and their families will benefit from a new partnership between the WA Country Health Service and the Child and Adolescent Health Service.

A service framework between the two organisations was signed in June articulating the roles and responsibilities of each service, including how the WA Country Health Service and the Child Development Service will work together to ensure the best outcomes for these children and their families in regional WA.

The framework relates to services provided to rural children and their families when accessing the metropolitan Child Development Service. This can include:

- the provision of direct services to children and families within the metropolitan area; and/or
- the provision of services via telehealth or other electronic medium and/or consultative advice and support to rural practitioners.

WA Country Health Service Chief Operating Officer, Jeffrey Moffet, said the establishment of a clear service framework was critical to the delivery of coordinated and streamlined services, to ensure continuity of services for children and their families living in country WA.

“The framework highlights the importance of strong and effective partnerships in delivering accessible and equitable services to all children,” Jeffrey said.
Strengthening graduate nurse programs

An innovative development in graduate nurse programs is strengthening the skills and knowledge of WA country nurses.

The WA Country Health Service has joined forces with the University of Notre Dame to offer first year registered nurses the opportunity to complete a Graduate Certificate in Clinical Nursing (GCCN) while undertaking their graduate nurse program.

The one-year course develops confidence in making clinical decisions while at the same time enhancing clinical skills and knowledge through activities such as study days, tutorials, presentations, competencies, self-directed learning, reflection and performance feedback.

The WA Country Health Service has graduate programs for registered nurses at 16 hospitals from large regional resource centres to small rural health facilities and most of these are now able to offer the formal qualification.

Sue Hennessey, Nursing Workforce Development Program Manager, said the program provides newly qualified nurses with a supportive environment allowing them to build on their knowledge and skills in delivering quality patient care.

“It’s an excellent foundation for future career advancement and has been specifically designed to provide ongoing development for graduate nurses with a focus on patient assessment, clinical governance and clinical nursing practice.

“An important feature of the program is its flexibility allowing each hospital to focus on aspects of nursing specific to its own rural environment whilst following a framework for consistency across regional WA.

“This has led to a number of benefits, in particular, the sharing of expertise and resources. Previously, many country hospitals supporting graduates worked in isolation limiting access to suitable education opportunities.

“Now, thanks to the collaborative approach, networking has occurred across a number of hospitals and the advancement of e-health has provided a further tool in overcoming the isolation with the increasing use of video-conferencing.

“We are working hard to attract nurses and show them all that country health has to offer. The experience provided through our graduate programs is very broad and offers a fantastic learning environment. I would like to thank staff throughout the WA Country Health Service for supporting graduate nurses and helping us to build on the strength of our nursing workforce. Whatever your area of interest, you are sure to find something to suit you in the country!”

To find out more about WA Country Health Service Graduate Nurse Program opportunities visit www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/graduatenurse
District Health Advisory Councils Chairpersons’ Forum a great success

The annual District Health Advisory Councils Chairpersons’ Forum was held in Perth in early June and proved a great success.

Nineteen Chairpersons and three Regional Directors from across the State attended the annual forum to discuss country health issues with each other, Ministers, Department of Health and WA Country Health Service leaders.

The aim of the forum was to achieve mutual recognition and understanding of the issues for each region and propose solutions.

Highlights of the forum for delegates were the informal sessions with Health Minister, Dr Kim Hames and Minister assisting the Minister for Health on country health, Terry Waldron.

Forum organiser, Melissa Vernon said the Chairpersons appreciated the opportunity to hear from the Ministers and discuss the issues that are important for their region.

She said a number of issues were discussed including how country people can achieve fairer access to health services as close to home as possible.

“Delegates were realistic in their expectations about what is possible and supported improvements in key areas such as increased general practitioner services, access to affordable dental services, aged care and accommodation for staff and trainees,” Melissa said.

“They would like to see nurse practitioner services available in the country and have the WA Country Health Service working with medical practitioners and other agencies to improve health services to country people.

“Investment in services that prevent and reduce the need for hospitalisation was high on their agenda,” she said.

Forum delegates also met with WA Country Health Service Chief Executive Officer Kim Snowball, who reinforced the importance of the District Health Advisory Councils’ influence on improving country health services.

Gascoyne District Health Advisory Council Chairperson, Greg Rose said he came away from the forum with a strong belief that both the WA Country Health Service and the District Health Advisory Council representatives strongly support community input into the health system.

“District Health Advisory Councils exist to act as one of the conduits between the health services and the community and we strongly recommend that our communities recognise the need to become part of the health system by voicing their concerns and suggestions,” Greg said.

Melissa said the forums contribute to the strategic direction of the WA Country Health Service, particularly in relation to those issues of highest importance to consumers and regional communities.

She paid tribute to the dedication and enthusiasm of the Chairpersons and District Health Advisory Council members.

“They are a remarkable group of individuals with a diverse range of skills, incredible commitment to their communities and capacity to network, link, lead, support and patiently move mountains. That’s why it is important they are engaged in health service improvement.”
Dedicated nurse retires after 50 years of service

Registered Nurse Joanna McLean has certainly earned her retirement after spending almost half a century looking after Western Australians.

Working for the last 23 years with Aboriginal people as part of the Country Health Connection unit at Shenton Park, Joanna and her team have been instrumental in changing the way health care is delivered to the indigenous community.

Reflecting on her 45 years as a nurse, Joanna said she had seen an abundance of change in the delivery of health services, which were often both challenging and interesting.

“Through nursing I have had the opportunity to meet some remarkable people, witnessed great change and had a fantastic career that has allowed me to forge lifelong friendships,” Joanna said.

Joanna began her nursing career back in 1957 at Royal Perth Hospital. Following her training, she moved to Geraldton in 1960 where she spent six months as a staff nurse before returning to Royal Perth to complete her staffing.

In 1961, Joanna followed the route of many Australians and took sail to England, spending 18 months travelling and working in a variety of jobs.

On her return to Australia she moved to Carnarvon working at the local District Hospital for 18 months before taking another break from nursing to manage the Highway Motels in Carnarvon and Geraldton.

But nursing was never far from her heart and Joanna resumed her career in 1969 at Royal Perth Hospital's Rehabilitation Campus at Shenton Park, completing a course in spinal injury the following year.

In 1983 Joanna moved into Community Health Services working at the Multiple Sclerosis Day Centre and in 1986 she took on a further challenge, moving into a new field of nursing with the Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Unit, where she remained for 23 years until her retirement earlier this year.

The Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Unit was transferred from Community Health to the WA Country Health Service in 2007 and has been more recently known as the WA Country Health Service Country Health Connection incorporating the ‘Meet and Assist’ service.

An important part of her role with the Country Health Connection unit was providing support to minimise the culture shock for people from remote communities who travelled to Perth for medical treatment.

“People often feel very frightened in Perth and may not be able to communicate how they feel being in a very strange place and a very long way from their homeland,” Joanna said.

“Another important part of our role was to remain in contact with the nurses in the remote areas and we used to contact them on a 2-way radio or by solar phone in the early days. In latter times, we used the fax machine and of course by phone.”

Joanna retired as a Registered Nurse in March this year and enjoyed a special farewell from her team members at the Country Health Connection unit.

WA Country Health Service Newsletter The Country Link

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