

Southern Inland Health Initiative

Mother's instincts lead her to ETS

Living on the eastern rim of the Wheatbelt, the residents of Lake Varley appreciate just how isolated they are – especially when they need urgent medical care. This situation is even more frightening when the person needing care is barely four-weeks old and struggling for breath.

When Anna-Lisa Newman returned home from Perth after giving birth to her beautiful baby girl, her three other children were fighting a chesty cough.

“My baby picked up the bug and developed a moist cough on Saturday evening. The next morning she began to vomit up her feeds, and by the afternoon she was having short episodes of choking and gasping for breath, which would resolve after she vomited.

“We are so far from medical services – 115kms from Lake Grace Hospital and Ravensthorpe Hospital – we need to approach illnesses carefully. We don't want to jump the gun and make a three-hour round trip unnecessarily, but we also can't delay our decisions too long in case things get worse.”

Anna-Lisa contacted the two 'local' hospitals prior to making the journey with her baby.

“Neither hospital had doctors on-call, so I decided to drive to Narrogin Hospital (260kms away). The nurse at Lake Grace told me about the Emergency Telehealth Service, which would link me to an emergency specialist in Perth, so when she had another episode I headed in that direction.

“When I arrived at Lake Grace, the nursing staff took some observations and straight away linked up the ETS. The technology worked seamlessly and I was impressed at how quickly the doctor was 'in the room' talking to us.

“The ETS doctor gave her a thorough examination and we discussed the pattern of her feeds, vomiting and her episodes of breathlessness, and the level of risk involved in sticking to my plan of driving to Narrogin.

“It was really useful being given this reassurance and support from the ETS doctor. What impressed me most about the ETS doctor was that he understood how isolated I was – and despite my baby being stable at the time – he didn't just advise us to go home and re-present if she got worse.”

Anna-Lisa arrived at Narrogin Hospital with her baby and was admitted for observation. In the early hours of the morning, she suffered a severe airway blockage and needed to be resuscitated. The local on-call doctor arrived promptly and arranged for RFDS to transport Anna-Lisa and her baby to Princess Margaret Hospital.

“My daughter was suffering from a blockage of her airway caused by thick mucus, so we spent seven days at PMH until the virus subsided and she could manage without oxygen.

“It was a very scary time for us and I think the new technology being used in the regions is a brilliant idea – it gives patients better access to doctors in emergency situations

“As a former acute care nurse, I also believe the Emergency Telehealth Service offers remote and regional nursing staff a great deal of reassurance and support.

The sporadic and varied nature of emergency presentations means you can be dealing with conditions you've never seen before – whereas the ETS provides a link to an emergency specialist who deals with these presentations much more often.”



Anna-Lisa's daughter being transferred via RFDS to PMH