

Royal Children's Hospital Alumni

Annual report for the 2025 annual general meeting

It is a privilege and honour for me as your president to present the 2025 Annual Report for the Royal Children's Hospital Alumni. This meeting marks 12 months since the new constitution was approved. The sky has not fallen in – on the contrary, we have gone on from strength to strength.

During 2025, your committee sought to renew relationships with the leaders of the institutions co-located on our campus. Caroline and I introduced ourselves to Peter Steer, the new CEO of the hospital. He had not previously been aware that RCH had an Alumni association. Since then, he has been very supportive and helpful. We had a very good meeting with Ryan Brown, the CEO of the RCH Foundation and will be holding our Aluminar meetings in the Foundation again next year, after a rather expensive year of having to hire space in the Mercure Hotel. We invited retiring staff from the MCRI and University Department of Paediatrics to become members, and some have done so. We have maintained cordial relations with the Executive of the Medical staff Association.

I mentioned in my report last year that we had had discussions internally about the desirability of having the hospital history updated. Peter Yule's book was published 30 years ago. Since last year, we have expanded the concept and now envision a substantial cross-campus update to be written by a professional historian. We prepared a brief proposal and sent it to all of the campus leaders. So far, the response has been very positive. Our proposal seems timely, as the MCRI will be celebrating its 40th anniversary next year, the University Department is starting a new era under Amy Gray's leadership and the hospital is going to have an international review in 2026.

Many of you sent in replies to our membership survey during the year and we thank you for doing that. The full report can be found in the November issue of Aluminations. The new committee will be taking your responses into account as they plan next year's program. One request, from a regional paediatrician, was that we hold some of our lunchtime meetings on a Friday or Monday, so that they can combine attending a meeting with weekend activities.

This year we held three Aluminars, all in the Mercure Hotel across Flemington Road. In March, Dr Jane Miller, former head of Social Work at RCH, spoke on "The origins of social work education in Victoria". In June, Professor Pamela Snow's topic was "The winds of change in reading instruction across the primary

years: the what, why and how.” Professor Andrew Steer topic in September was “Small but mighty: public health control of neglected diseases and Australia’s contribution to global health”. We were involved in the selection of Professor Mike South as the 2025 Vernon Collins Orator, and he gave an excellent lecture on “Digital dynamite: Technology is blowing up our healthcare as we know it”. We will shortly be hearing Associate Professor Jenny Hynson’s Alum-oration entitled “Unfortunate events and unexpected rewards: the development of a palliative care service for children.”

We wanted to find other ways of raising the profile of the Alumni. Jane Williamson made the very good suggestion that one of our members might be invited to introduce the speakers at Grand Rounds and Trevor Duke agreed to this. Colin Robertson represented us when four members of his former department presented a seminar on cystic fibrosis and he was given the opportunity to comment on the advances that have been made.

Two issues of our newsletter, Aluminations, were published since this time last year and from your responses to the survey, it is valued as a mode of communication. It could be used much more and in any way that members would want. Christine Rodda, assisted by Bev Touzel, will be taking over the editorship next year. I encourage everyone to think about contributing to Aluminations – it totally depends on voluntary offerings.

Caroline initiated an Alumni WhatsApp group during the latter half of the year. It is an excellent and easy way for us to communicate with members, much simpler to use than email, but it is an opt-in group. If you want to opt in but don’t know how, speak to Caroline.

Gigi has made significant improvements to the Alumni website. It is a repository for a lot of great information including profiles of many members. We would like to have a profile on everyone, so if you don’t have one, have a look at what’s there and write your own, remembering that the website is an open access site. Links to video recordings of most talks are also to be found there. But did you know that a video recording of the last Grand Round at the old hospital is on the website? It is well worth watching again.

Behind the scenes, our incredibly energetic vice-president, who is also our treasurer, has been tidying up our membership database and reviewing our banking arrangements. She will speak about this in her report.

Let's have a look at how our membership has changed over the last 10-15 years. In 2010, we had around 130 members, almost all of whom were medical or dental. In 2015, that number had grown to 163. Now it is 218, which means that we have 33% more members than we had 10 years ago.

In 2015, 30% were women and 70% were men. Now, of our 218 members, 41% are women. Twenty-nine percent of our 218 members are from non-medical backgrounds. Thirty members live outside Australia and 23 live interstate. It's worth noting that 36% of us are aged 80 or more. Inevitably, some of our members are in poor health, and one of our roles is to help them to stay connected with their friends.

What do these statistics mean? First of all, the change in the gender split over time is consistent with the rise in the number of women in paediatrics. Secondly, the greater diversity in professional backgrounds means that as a group or community, we resemble more closely the way people related to one another in multidisciplinary teams in the workplace. It's good that we can continue to see our friends from disciplines other than our own after retirement. Thirdly, it means that the RCH Alumni is a cross-campus organisation, as intended. Given that we have 53 members living either interstate or overseas, we need to look for ways of meeting the needs of this group and of giving them the chance to participate and contribute.

Your committee has worked hard and extremely well throughout the year. In particular, I want to highlight the incredible job our secretary, Christine Rodda, has done for the Alumni while coping with major responsibilities and pressures caused by illness and disability in her family. Thank you, Christine – I know it has not been easy. And how lucky was I to have Caroline as my vice-president. She could not have been more efficient or more helpful. Kevin Collins continues to make a strong contribution and he has kept me entertained with his witticisms and anecdotes. Bronwyn Hewitt has organised all of the Aluminars and has negotiated with the Mercure Hotel staff on our behalf. Thanks Bronwyn. Jill Sewell has taken on the membership portfolio and will be looking at ways we can encourage members from a range of backgrounds. Gigi always keeps us grounded and helps in many ways, as do our four new members, Peter Bunworth, Roger Allen, Frank Oberklaid and Jane Williamson.

We gained 14 new members this year and I say welcome to all of them, especially any who are here at this meeting. We also lost some and while that's inevitable

as members reach old age, we know how much we valued, loved and respected them. I want to name and honour 12 members who have died:

- Professor Glenn Bowes AO
- Dr Geoff Mullins
- Mr Sumitra Wickramasinghe
- Dr Valerie Mayne
- Mr Geoffrey Klug AM
- Mr Robert Fowler
- Associate Professor Roger Hall OAM
- Mr Durham Smith AO
- Dr Peter Loughnan
- Dr Dawn Giltinan
- Professor Jim Camakaris
- Mr Stuart Brown (died in NZ 2022)

When I first joined the Alumni, I was amazed at how many remarkable people I found there and getting to know them in this post-retirement setting has been one of the greatest joys of my life. Thank you for giving me the privilege of being your president for the past two years. I am happy to pass the baton. The office bearers we are about to elect will make a wonderful team. I wish them all the very best.

Garry Warne
President