

Customer Service Centre opens

On Wednesday 19th March, RDNS' Customer Service Centre (CSC) was officially opened by the Hon. Lisa Neville, Minister for Mental Health, Senior Victorians and Community Services.

The Customer Service Centre is the central point of contact for all referrals and enquiries to RDNS. Via dedicated 1300 numbers, clients, referrers, business and industry partners and the general public receive a consistent and professional response from dedicated CSC staff, who are supported by leading edge computer and telephone technology.

In welcoming guests to the launch, CEO Dan Romanis reflected on the motivation for establishing the CSC.

"Each person has the right to the best possible experience of RDNS the moment they walk through our 'front door'. For most people, our front door means a phone call to RDNS. Each experience needs to be affirming, hopeful, positive and it must declare our promise to provide compassionate, professional nursing care," Mr Romanis told guests.

"The Customer Service Centre provides a welcome, an assurance and a solution to those who are seeking our services for the first time. It provides a comforting

re-assurance of our commitment to those who are seeking our services in a repeat manner," he said.

Mr Romanis also reflected on the ambitious nature of the project. "There was much to consider as we forged ahead – a building site to select and fit out, setting up new telephone numbers, introducing new and cutting edge computer and telephone technology, training staff and migrating the former functions of some 20 RDNS centres into this single facility in Hartwell. But after enormous hard work and dedication, I take pleasure in standing here with you all today to celebrate this milestone."

In officially opening the CSC, Minister Neville talked positively about the impact that RDNS has made on the community for over 120 years and described the establishment of the Customer Service Centre as an important step forward as we consolidate access to our services.

"I can see that the Customer Service Centre is equipped with the best available information and telephone technology to support the centre's staff. It is a great example of RDNS' far-sighted investment

in computing and communications technology," Minister Neville told the gathering.

"I know that this new level of technology will continue to demonstrate RDNS has a strong history of being a model of good clinical practice in community care."

At the conclusion of formalities, the Minister was accompanied on a formal tour of the Customer Service Centre before enjoying a demonstration of the CSC's computer and telephone software, gaining an insight into how enquiries are managed and how client referrals are processed.



L to R: Minister Neville with RDNS Chairman Jillian Pappas and CEO Dan Romanis

Healing the wounds

Before cutting the ribbon to mark the official opening of RDNS' Customer Service Centre, Minister Neville also announced a Victorian package of wound care initiatives totalling nearly \$3 million over the next four years.

"RDNS has been working in partnership with the Department of Human Services

on improving wound management and practice and \$275,000 is allocated to RDNS to improve clinical pathways for wound management clients," she announced.

"Skin integrity is a significant issue for older people and treating people with wounds is a substantial part of the work

of district nursing services. Improving wound management practice has been a focus for projects undertaken by the Department in partnership with several nursing services in Victoria, including RDNS," Minister Neville explained.

RDNS expands workforce

Royal District Nursing Service is set to expand its nursing workforce when it begins employing Division 2 nurses for the first time in its long history. The first Division 2 recruits are due to commence with RDNS in May.

The move will mean that we will be able to grow our pool of nursing staff to cater for the increasing demand for services in the face of growing nurse shortages. With recent changes to the educational preparation of Division 2 nurses and amendments to relevant legislation, RDNS is now able to offer suitable employment opportunities for Division 2 nurses.

Division 2 nurses working at RDNS will be able to provide a broad range of the nursing care offered by the organisation, however many practices will still only be able to be provided by Division 1 nurses. The assessment of clients, development of nursing care plans, and complex technical nursing care will remain the primary responsibility of Division 1 nurses.

Division 2 nurses starting work with RDNS will undertake an extensive orientation program to enable them to confidently fulfil their role. CEO Dan Romanis says that Division 2 nurses will add a vital new dimension to the organisation and will enable RDNS to care for extra clients.

“Last year we delivered the most client visits in our entire 123 year history. Demand is increasing constantly, so to be able to expand our workforce by employing Division 2 nurses is obviously going to help us to meet that demand,” he says. “This will have a positive impact on our clients but also it will have a positive effect on our current staff. Simply put, it provides us with options that we haven’t had before.”

“Of course, whilst this initiative means that we have more capacity to care for the growing needs of our many clients, it also means new career opportunities for nurses who in the past have not been able to pursue a job with RDNS,” he explains. “This is a very good move that is going to have positive effects right across the board,” Mr Romanis says.

Hot but still heartfelt

RDNS' Homeless Persons Program (HPP) held its annual *Where the Heart Is Community Festival* in mid-March in Fitzroy's Edinburgh Gardens.

Now in its fourth year, the festival provides a tangible way to help alleviate the harsh conditions in which homeless people live by providing them with a day of food, celebration and social connection. The festival is the only one of its kind in Melbourne, offering a day of refuge for those in the community who are doing it tough.

Despite sweltering conditions courtesy of an unseasonable heatwave, this year's attendees enjoyed a scrumptious barbeque lunch; received grooming treatments including manicures, haircuts and massages; took part in

art and craft activities; and enjoyed live entertainment. Participants also received free healthcare advice and information on where they can access specialist services.

Funded by a variety of agencies, including the City of Yarra and VicHealth, RDNS' major community partner RACV also participated in the event, with seven of its staff volunteering to help out with the day's festivities.

In recent times, the *Where the Heart Is Community Festival* has received recognition for the role it plays in caring for Melbourne's homeless. In 2006, the festival was recognised as the City of

Yarra's 'Community Event of the Year' and in late 2007, the festival received a nomination in the auspicious Melbourne Awards.



Cutting edge: free haircuts were on offer at the festival

Clinical detectives

To ensure RDNS' nursing practice is based on current evidence, RDNS operates a number of Clinical Leadership Groups (CLGs). The purpose of a CLG is to contribute to better client outcomes by promoting an evidence-based practice culture in the provision of clinical services within RDNS. This is achieved through the investigation of issues that have current or potential implications for clinical practice and making recommendations about care.

CLGs have been operating at RDNS since 2001 and enable clinical issues to be addressed using evidence from literature and by accessing expert clinical opinion. CLGs have been established in aged care, continence, diabetes, palliative care, wound management and stomal therapy. Members include nurses with expertise in the subject matter and a centre manager. A representative from

the Helen Macpherson Smith Institute of Community Health (the Institute) supports the work of each group. The close working relationship between the CLG and the Institute facilitates the development and implementation of research projects and education programs that lead to improved nursing skills and, in turn, better client care.

Members of the CLG are selected because of their interest in wanting to make a difference in clinical care, as well as their knowledge and expertise in the nominated clinical field. Some of the recent achievements of CLGs have included the introduction of a pressure ulcer risk assessment tool; developing a catalogue

of wound management products; the development of a best practice urinary catheter management model; a literature review on the use of Lignocaine gel in female catheterization and the development of a procedure and assessment tool for falls prevention.



On the case: members of the Wound Management CLG

A little help from our friends

In recent times RDNS has been fortunate to receive significant support from the community which has enabled us to improve the services we provide, undertake important health-related research and assist our less fortunate clients.

One major player in supporting our work has been RACV. For the past three years, RACV and RDNS have enjoyed a community partnership which has underpinned improvements to many aspects of our work. We are delighted that RACV has decided to renew the community partnership with RDNS in 2008.

This year, the partnership will enable RDNS' Homeless Persons Program (HPP) to purchase another car to extend services in the Springvale area. It will also provide much needed funding for HPP's Food and Nutritional Support Program and include transport assistance for the homeless.

The RACV/RDNS partnership remains strong and mutually beneficial. Primarily, it is designed to raise RDNS' profile and increase awareness of the Homeless Persons Program among RACV staff and members. It also demonstrates RACV's commitment to assist the wider community.

In addition to financial support offered through the partnership, RACV staff volunteers have made a wonderful

contribution, helping to prepare our Christmas cards for sale and pack food hampers for HPP clients. This is a wonderful continuing relationship and we are exceptionally grateful for the magnificent support provided by RACV and their dedication to our work.

Another example of support comes from the J O & J R Wicking Trust, which is funding a two year research project that will not only give us a far better understanding of the problem of dementia within our client population, but ultimately result in an improved model of care for clients with dementia.

Similarly the Marian & E H Flack Trust has supported RDNS for many years and during that time has helped us purchase important diagnostic equipment, which has enabled our nurses to provide better care in the area of continence management. They have also helped provide best practice wound care products for needy clients by subsidising the cost of these expensive items.

None of these projects could have been contemplated without the generous support of the community and certain businesses. RDNS has few resources to undertake new initiatives and we are heavily reliant on donations and grants to help us continue and improve our services.

A late scratching

RDNS' Annual Raceday has been a feature event for a number of years, providing our business partners with an enjoyable day of good food, good wine and good racing, whilst at the same time supporting RDNS.

Raceday 2008 was due to take place on April 9; regrettably the event recently had to be cancelled. The Victorian Racing Club (VRC) informed us that, due to recently identified issues with the quality of the track, the racecourse is unsuitable for racing at present. Remedial work is planned and will bring the track up to standard, but unfortunately, this will take some months.

We sincerely apologise for any inconvenience this situation has caused supporters of Raceday. However, we are in discussion with the VRC about an alternative date later in the year and look forward to once again being able to invite you to this wonderful day out.

Partners in medical education

RDNS is proud to be a partner in the training of medical doctors by contributing towards Monash University's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' Community Based Practice Program (CBPP).

Essentially, the CBPP offers medical students an opportunity to gain an insight into the 'real-world' of their future profession. General aims of the program are to help students understand patients as a 'whole person', in particular the social and economic context of their health and illness, including aspects such as medical, social, cultural, political, economic, psychological and ethical. It will also focus on issues of social justice and equity in the delivery of healthcare.

Second year medical students from Monash University will be assigned to undertake community placements with participating organisations/agencies, of which RDNS is one, for one day a week over a period of 14 weeks. Via these placements, students will learn about the structures, systems and approaches used to provide care to people within a multi-disciplinary framework.

The placements will also allow students to observe human skills including communication, compassion, kindness, empathy and respect, so that they may emulate these qualities in their pursuit to become healthcare professionals. Importantly, the satisfactory completion of this community placement is a requirement for students in their progression toward attaining their medical degrees.

A total of eight second year medical students will be assigned to RDNS for their CBPP placements in 2008, commencing their placements in April with completion by September. Experienced RDNS nursing staff will assume the role of Field Educators to facilitate placements and students will be further supported by RDNS centre managers and other clinical nurses. The RDNS Institute will provide overall coordination for the placements.

RDNS' involvement in this initiative is just the beginning of the development of further opportunities for collaboration with other tertiary institutions and community organisations in their training programs for healthcare professionals. We are delighted to be involved in such a project.

‘Driving ambition’ - staff profile

When nurse Anja Giling was working at a metropolitan rehabilitation centre, she observed first hand the work of a nurse from Royal District Nursing Service.

The experience opened up a whole new world of nursing for the career-minded Anja and prompted her to find out more about RDNS. ‘I had always admired the district nurses; I felt they always did such a good job with their clients and the work was somewhat different from mainstream nursing,’ explains Anja.

Two years after that initial introduction to RDNS, Anja is now based at our Moorabbin centre, one of 20 RDNS centres, and is enjoying a role that allows her great autonomy whilst at the same time giving her the support of colleagues, mentors and managers.

In addition, RDNS’ advancements in mobile computer technology have allowed Anja to find more of a balance between nursing and spending time with her family. “RDNS’ mobile computer technology gives me remote access to everything I need to start my working day,” says Anja. “I can log-on from home, which is perfect because I’m then able to drop off my children to care prior to seeing my clients for the day,” she explains.

Anja spends the majority of her mornings visiting clients in an independent living facility, and then visits clients in their homes in the afternoons. “One of the greatest satisfactions of the job is its diversity. I treat clients with a wide variety of conditions including diabetes, dementia and leg wounds. We have a very strong rapport with our clients; it’s a privilege to be invited into their homes to provide tailored nursing care,” says Anja.

She explains that although it’s a challenge to be an autonomous nurse looking after 12-15 clients a day, she has received rewards she couldn’t imagine gaining elsewhere. “It’s a very different environment to a hospital ward, so you really have to learn how to make executive decisions. But that is exciting and very rewarding. Some of the decisions we make can be life saving for clients, and that’s truly satisfying,” Anja explains proudly.

She believes that RDNS’ commitment to on-going staff education and training has also helped her to flourish in her role as a district nurse. “The orientation into RDNS is so comprehensive; it’s phenomenal the amount of time RDNS dedicates to build staff confidence and skill levels. It ensures that all staff are able to work safely and successfully in the community setting,” Anja explains.

After almost 18 months with RDNS, Anja has seen how the organisation offers job opportunities for nurses at all stages of their career. “District nurses do so much more than ‘pure nursing’. We coordinate a wide range of other services and collaborate with many other organisations,” says Anja. “It’s holistic nursing.”

Summing up her decision to try her hand at district nursing, Anja says: “Everything I’ve learnt previously in nursing has really had the chance to be enhanced at RDNS.”

Anja Giling is enjoying the challenges of district nursing

