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Volunteers restore sight to hundreds of Cambodians

HUNDREDS OF CAMBODIANS have had their eyesight restored thanks to volunteers like Doctor David Merefield.

Dr Merefield, from Coral Coast Anaesthesia, was one of a group of volunteer doctors and nurses who each year travel to Cambodia as a part of the Cambodia Vision team, an NGO responsible for treating thousands of Cambodians, restoring their sight, treating their eyes and returning them to work.

This year was the first time Dr Merefield had worked with Cambodia Vision.

"A couple of theatre nurses at The Friendlies had been involved before," Dr Merefield said.

"They had talked about it and it sounded like a rewarding opportunity, so I expressed an interest to go and a space opened up this year," he said.

"We performed a number of eye operations on cataracts and pterygiums on the poorest of Cambodians. This year we were able to treat 433 patients in just six days."

Dr Merefield was one of three anaesthetists working with seven ophthalmologists and said eye damage and disease was a huge problem in Cambodia.

"Cambodians work out in the sun and they don't wear sunglasses, and in Cambodia if you can't see then you can't work.

"They become non-productive and become a burden on the people in their family who are productive."

Dr Merefield said he was proud to be able to work with an organisation such as Cambodia Vision.

"It is run by Cambodian expats, so it is well appropriated and targeted foreign aid," he said.

"They go once a year at the end of October, which is the end of the wet season. More than 3000 people are assessed each year."

Registered Nurse Eileen Betts has been involved with Cambodia Vision since 2007 and has travelled to Cambodia each year.

"Mr and Mrs Lee escaped the Khmer Rouge and did quite well for themselves, so they wanted to give back to their country men and form an NGO (Non-government organisation)," Mrs Betts said.



"I had a friend in Sydney who asked me if I wanted to go – I have been in the eye world all of my nursing life," she said.

Mrs Betts set about collecting items they would need and canvassing businesses to donate items.

"The very first trip, we did 70 eyes and last year we did 433," she said.

When Mrs Betts "retired" to Bundaberg in 2011, she began working part-time as a theatre nurse at The Friendlies and continued her annual trips to Cambodia, inspiring other staff to join the charity.

The Friendlies has also been able to assist with providing the anaesthetic drugs needed to perform the operations each year since 2012.

"I am able to get 98% of the consumables free and everything else we get a discount on," Mrs Betts said.



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Touch-screen portable ultrasound machine arrives at The Friendlies

A STATE-OF-THE-ART ULTRASOUND machine, with the most advanced image quality and touch screen display has arrived at The Friendlies.

The Mindray TE7 is designed for use in anaesthetics, theatre, ICU and emergency departments due to its lightweight and portable nature. Add that to the touchscreen and ability to enable scan pre-sets, and the new \$60,000 machine will be an asset for making rapid patient-care decisions.

CEO Alan Cooper said initially it was anaesthetists who work at The Friendlies who requested the hospital consider purchasing the machine.

"We want to give all our specialists access to the best equipment to do their jobs, but unfortunately as a not-for-profit we do have to prioritise these requests in consideration of many other factors," Mr Cooper said.

"The Friendlies was not going to be

able to purchase the machine at this time, but we applied for a grant with St John's Grace Fund in the hope they could assist us.

"We are pleased to be a recipient of \$15,000."

St John's Grace Fund chairman Ross Ridge said the fund had given over \$1million to the Bundaberg community since it began in 2011.

"The fund goes to supporting important projects like RACQ Careflight, Impact Street Outreach program, Tom Quinn Centre's Bungara Independent School and Phoenix House," Mr Ridge said.

Mr Cooper thanked Mr Ridge and the St John's Grace Fund for their support of the local community.

"This machine, which will assist in advancing patient care, has been made possible by the St John's Grace Fund," he said.



Friendly Society Private Hospital CEO Alan Cooper, St John's Grace Fund Chairman Ross Ridge and Secretary Lyn Duldig with the Mindray TE7.

More patients treated with opening of Unit 5



MORE PATIENTS THAN EVER before will now be treated at The Friendlies, with the opening of Unit 5. The Friendlies completed its Stage 5 development in 2011, which increased the bed numbers within the hospital from 85 to 143 across five units of the hospital.

Unit 5 is now fully operational and will open and close based on patient needs. It will be the first time all five units have been open at the same time.

Mr Cooper said the opening of Unit 5 signalled the strong growth the hospital was experiencing as more doctors and patients made The Friendlies their hospital of choice in Bundaberg.

"We have always planned to have all five units open, but it was a matter of when," Mr Cooper said.

"When we relocated Unit 4 to level two of the hospital in January 2015, the William Schoch Unit, which is now known as Unit 5, underwent some much-needed refurbishment.

"As the oldest part of the hospital, we were committed to ensuring it is kept up to the same standard as the other inpatient units within the hospital.

Unit 5 received a major refurbishment of new paint and floor coverings, as well as new handrails, light fittings, bathroom fixtures and blinds. A new communal patient lounge was also built.

"Unit 5 will now be opened as a medical unit, which will relieve the pressure on our other medical units 1 and 2 and will be a specialist unit for patients who have lower-care needs as they transition out of hospital.

"This will also ensure units 3 and 4 can continue to be dedicated to the pre and post surgical care of patients moving through our theatres," Mr Cooper said.

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Dedicated endoscopy unit planned

UTILISING THE SPACE made vacant by the relocation of the Day Oncology Unit, The Friendlies is looking to relieve the pressure on the hospital's current theatres by creating a purpose-built endoscopy unit.

CEO Alan Cooper said the development of a dedicated Endoscopy Unit will relieve the burden on the five current hospital theatres.

"We welcomed more surgeons in 2016, with more expected to start this year. While this brings many great services to the region, it does mean we need to make sure all our surgeons and their patients can be accommodated comfortably in our theatres, and our recovery areas.

"Until that expansion can be completed, we want to make sure patients coming in for day procedures are as comfortable as possible before, during and after their procedure. That is why we are planning to create the purpose-built endoscopy unit."

The refurbishment of the area is well underway, with the unit to be fully operational by February 2017.

On August 11, 2016, the Friendly Society Private Hospital opened a 14-chair Day Oncology Unit. The vacated area is now being converted into a dedicated endoscopy unit.



The Friendlies Foundation receives \$15,000 donation

THE FRIENDLIES FOUNDATION received a \$15,000 boost at the annual The Friendlies Cane2Coral funds distribution recently.

The Friendlies Foundation was just one charity that shared in \$57,220.50 of funding that was given back to the Bundaberg community following the seventh successful event in 2016.

Friendlies Cane2Coral President Jason Pascoe said it was due to the support of sponsors, volunteers and members of the Bundaberg community who participated in our 2016 event, that such a large sum was able to be given to schools, charities and not-for-profits.

The Friendly Society Private Hospital is proud to have been the naming rights sponsor of the event since it began.

"The event was fittingly recognised this year as the Bundaberg Region's Australia Day – Community Event of the Year," Mr Cooper said.

"The Australia Day award is deserved recognition of all the amazing volunteers and sponsors who have worked with true community spirit to make The Friendlies Cane2Coral so special to the Bundaberg region."



Friendly Society Private Hospital CEO Alan Cooper receives a \$15,000 donation on behalf of The Friendlies Foundation from committee secretary Jason Chester at The Friendlies Cane2Coral funds distribution.

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