

Friends of Vellore, Victoria

A division of Australian Board of Vellore Christian Medical College & Hospital Support Fund ABN 65 125 097 974



December 2017 NEWSLETTER

From the President's pen



David Runia FOVV President

As the end of the year approaches the group of Friends of Vellore Victoria can look back on another successful year of support for the work of the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore, Southern India.

Let me first mention the year's two main events. The annual fund-raising dinner was held at Queen's College on August 12th and was attended by a sell-out crowd of 86 attendees. The highlight of the evening were the presentations of Hugh Skeil, Manager of the Development Office at Vellore, and his wife Dr Debbie Skeil. You can read a report of their talks elsewhere in this Newsletter. The dinner raised the sum of over \$6000 in support of the CMCH and the work of the Australian Vellore Board.

Just over a month later, on September 16th, it was time for our Annual General Meeting. It too was held at Queen's College and was well attended, with about 30 friends present. The guest speaker this time was Dr Niranjana Thomas from the Department of Neonatology at Vellore, who is spending a year's sabbatical at the University of Melbourne. He gave a fascinating presentation of how he has developed a low-cost alternative to the machines needed to cool babies who suffered from oxygen deprivation during the birth process. It is now being commercially produced under the name of the miracradle. See the detailed report below.

Last year we made the decision to focus our fund-raising efforts on three areas: people, buildings and education. As you can read in the extract from the treasurer's report, donations were made to the emergency fund of the Development Department, stewarded by Hugh Skeil. They were also made to a fund which will support renovations of the Chatram, low-cost accommodation for families who need to stay in Vellore to support loved ones undergoing long-term treatment. But the most substantial donations have been directed towards educational goals. See the special article devoted to these projects in the Newsletter.

We are most grateful to our loyal donors who have made these gifts possible. We strongly encourage all the Friends of Vellore in Victoria to consider giving further financial support and also to spread the word about the inspiring work done in Christ's name for the needy and the destitute in Southern India.

The Friends of Vellore Victoria committee wishes all the friends and their friends and loved ones a joyful Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord. May the message of peace and goodwill percolate through a world that needs it so very badly.

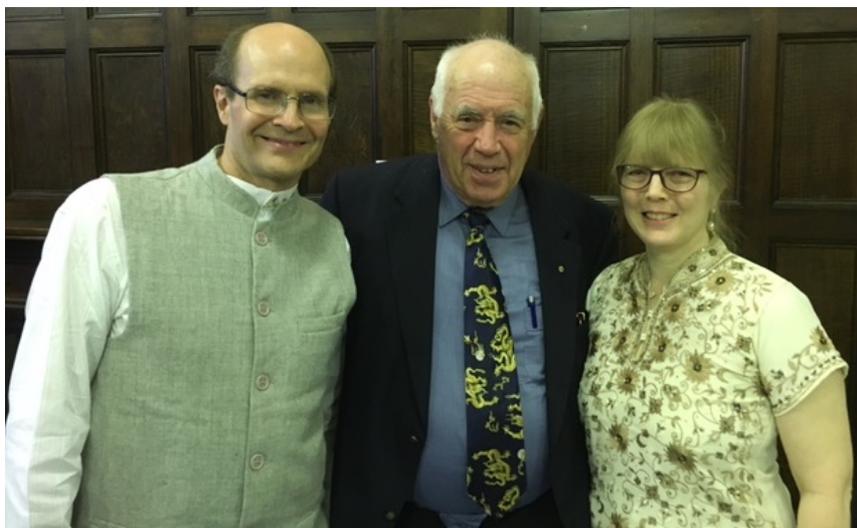
Hugh and Debbie Skeil visit Australia and Melbourne

A highlight of the year for the Friends of Vellore, both nationally and here in Victoria, was the visit of Hugh Skeil, Manager of the Development Office at CMCH Vellore, and his wife Dr Debbie Skeil. The Skeils spent more than three weeks in Australia, visiting four states and attending various dinners and other events. Here in Victoria we were most privileged to have them as our guests of honour at the annual fund-raising dinner on August 12.

Hugh originally trained as an accountant, while Debbie studied medicine. During the past eighteen years they have lived at Vellore, sponsored by the Church Missionary Society of London. Hugh has his office at the Hospital and is the chief go-to person for all the fund-raising and publicity activities of CMCH. One of his tasks is to coordinate the fund-raising carried out by the various Friends of Vellore groups around the world, suggesting projects and making sure that the monies raised reach their right destination. He also manages the Development department emergency fund for assisting patients who cannot afford expensive treatment, to which the Victorian friends have contributed in recent years.

There could be no one more suitable than Hugh to update us on recent developments at the College and the Hospital. He began by giving us some statistics: the hospital has about 3000 beds, it sees over 8000 people daily as Out Patients, and has over 9000 staff. People come to CMCH from all over India and neighbouring countries and as far away as Singapore and Africa. It is well-equipped with the latest technology, and provides excellent care, but the most important factor in its continuing success is its Christian ethos. Hugh also informed us about the important developments at the two new hospitals (on this see elsewhere in this Newsletter).

Then it was Debbie's turn to speak about her work. She has been engaged for some years in assisting in the CMCH's rehabilitation unit, specialising in work with children. A dedicated room for children with physical disabilities has been established and she assists in the rehabilitation work that takes place there.



Hugh and Debbie Skeil with David Price OAM, Patron FOVV

One of the challenges is following up the patients after they have been discharged from the program and ensuring that they continue the exercises and activities that they have been taught. She showed a photo of a wheelchair which was in a corner and full of clothing and obviously not being used. The staff do community visits to those patients who live locally, but it is more difficult to check if they live further away.

Every year in February the Mela festival takes place at Vellore, with over 200 people in wheelchairs coming from up to 100 km away. On the Friday they are all assessed for diabetes, ulcers, eye tests and Ultrasound etc. This assessment is provided free, and the only expense people have is to travel there. On the Saturday there are sports for the people in wheelchairs, and entertainment.

Debbie also told us that email and video conferencing are being explored as ways to continue the rehabilitation once people return home to more distant places. The World Health Organisation is sponsoring training at Vellore for people from other countries. Remarkably there have been students from North Korea who have attended three workshops under this sponsorship program.

Everyone present at the dinner was impressed and inspired by the work that Hugh and Debbie are doing as volunteers at Vellore under conditions very different from those in their home country England. Dr Nancy Nicholas responded to their talks with a vote of thanks, in which she wished them God's blessing on the contribution that they are making to the Hospital and its patients and to the College and its students.

The Miracradle: a neo-natal life-saving device developed in Vellore

Guest speaker at the Annual General Meeting of the FOVV this year was Dr Niranjana Thomas. A neonatal paediatrician at the CMCH, he spoke to us on the topic of "Low Cost Innovation in Newborn Care—a Vellore Experience."



Most of the work at CMCH is clinical and for purposes of teaching. Research is only carried out in the little spare time that remains. Since much of the treatment is on a charitable basis, incubators which are expensive to buy and to run are not used for premature babies. Although there is excellent equipment to look after the small and sick

newborns when required, where possible low-cost equipment is used, and this is usually locally made. The babies are discharged at a weight of 1.8kg (lower than here in Australia) and their mothers and grandmothers are taught how to manage them. There is accommodation for the mothers and grandmothers to stay in those cases when they need to learn how to care for the premature babies.

Dr Thomas said that in low and middle-income countries such as India about 14 of every 1000 babies have Hypoxic Ischaemic Encephalopathy (in Australia it occurs less than two times per 1000 live births. (This condition is a brain injury due to oxygen deprivation during the birth process. It can cause death, or developmental delay and epilepsy, and varies in severity depending on the length of time the brain is deprived of oxygen.) It has been shown that lowering the baby's temperature within six hours of birth for several days, a process called Therapeutic Hypothermia, is able to reduce mortality and neurodevelopmental disability in babies that are suffering from this condition.

The machines used in Australia to cool these babies cost \$50,000 each and need a continuous supply of electricity. Such a cost is prohibitive and the electricity supply is not reliable in many of the low-mid income countries. A low-cost use of cool gel has been effective, but it needs to be changed every 4 hours and the temperatures monitored and adjusted constantly. Dr Thomas was on the lookout for a better low-cost solution.

He noted that so-called phase change materials (PCM) have been used in textiles and in buildings in order to provide insulation, absorbing and releasing heat at a nearly constant temperature dependant on the particular chemical formulation. These materials would be suitable for lowering and maintaining a constant temperature for cooling the babies. So, he set in motion a project at CMCH to develop a cradle that could be trialled for this purpose. It has proved to be a great success. Since 2011, PCM has been used in a cradle made of locally available materials. This has resulted in less fluctuation in temperature, less need for intervention by nursing staff, less shivering and less risk of skin injury than with cool gel packs and without need for a constant electricity supply. The cost is a fraction of the cost of the machines used here (about \$3200 a cradle).

The MiraCradle Neonate Cooler has received a number of awards for innovation in health technology. It is now in use in 150 hospitals around India and in other countries such as South Africa, Turkey, Kenya. Further information can be found at www.miracradle.com. Dr Thomas is to be congratulated on this most effective piece of practical research which has made such a difference to the life prospects of at risk babies in Vellore and around the world.

Finances — An extract from the treasurer's report to the AGM

The past financial year 2016/17 has been notable for the significant contribution of \$48,182 that FOVV has made to Vellore CMCH. This contribution has been as follows:

\$11,000	Community Lay Leaders Health Certificate Course - Dr. Sydney Paul
\$450	Howard Norman Nursing Scholarship
\$1000	Ted and Edna Gault Nursing Scholarship
\$3,867	CMC Development Department Emergency Fund
\$6,222	Chatram Renovations Fund
\$25,643	Further donations to Education

The FOVV Annual Dinner, held in August 2017, attracted donations of over \$6000. 100% of all monies donated are forwarded to Vellore CMC. Profit from the dinner is used to defray minor expenses and contribute to the administrative costs of the Australian Vellore Board.

The FOVV Annual Giving program that was started in 2016 attracted donations of more than \$10,000. It will be continued in 2018.



*FOVV committee members together with guest speakers Hugh and Debbie Skeil.
From left to right: David Price OAM, Heidi Winnen, Hugh Skeil, Jim Richardson, Viviane Harangozo, Nancy Nicholas, David Runia, Evelyn Lehmann, Rev Colin Honey, Debbie Skeil, Louise Joy.*

Supporting education at Vellore

A cornerstone of the Friends of Vellore Victoria's fundraising for the needy and disadvantaged in southern India are the donations that support education. The students who train to become doctors at the College are generally well supported financially. This is less the case for those who aspire to become nurses or to work in allied health areas of medicine. The greatest need is perhaps to be found in the case of the trainees who participate in programs involving community health.

For a number of years, through the generosity of one particular donor, FOVV has assisted students attaining the Community Lay-Leaders Health Training Certificate (CLHTC). The Department of Distance Education at CMC and the Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs (RUHSA) have established a program which trains a hundred Christian NGO workers per year from the remote parts of India. The goal is to equip those who are already in areas of poor healthcare access with the ability to provide basic, compassionate and holistic health care to their own family members as well as their communities. It will enable them to prevent and treat many of the life-threatening diseases, such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, nutritional deficiencies, and pregnancy, neonatal and perinatal problems.



Most of these remote villages have little access to health care, as 80% of health professionals live in the cities whereas 73% of the Indian population live in villages. The course involves working through a booklet each month with assignments to complete, and Health Promotion activities are also taught. The trainees need to attend three sessions of 20 days each, held in Mission hospitals around the country, for "hands-on" training, and have examinations during these contact programs. The cost of the course is Rs 8000 (\$160 AUD) including board while attending the contact programs.

The support we give the program not only allows disadvantaged students to train for this course who otherwise would not be able to pay the fees. It also indirectly promotes the spread of essential medical services to parts of India that so far have remained out of reach because of lack of suitably trained medical personnel.

In addition, the FOVV has established two endowment funds in support of education at Vellore. The one fund allows Ted & Edna Gault nursing scholarship to be awarded to trainees from a disadvantaged background. The Geoff Charlesworth paramedical scholarships do the same for the area of Allied Health. These scholarships are life-transforming for those who receive them.

New Director of CMCH takes over



The new CMC director Dr J.V. Peter

The 23rd of September 2017 was an important day in the history of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, for on that day Dr J. V. Peter began his term as the new Director of the institution, taking over from Dr Sunil Chandy, who completed his five-year term.

Dr Peter studied medicine at the College as a member of the batch of '82. Like other directors before him, he knows Australia well, having done post-doctoral training at the University of Adelaide. Before commencing his current role, he was Associate Director of Finance. So, he will be well aware of the financial constraints that he will be working under as he takes over the helm.

The following day, Sunday 24 September 2017, in accordance with long-standing tradition, a service of thanksgiving and commissioning was held at the College.

The Rt. Rev. Dr Rajavelu, Bishop of the Church of Southern India Vellore Diocese, commissioned the new Director to stay committed to God to lead the institution in His way, to which the Director responded by publicly acknowledging his 'purpose, resolution and the engagement of his call'. The service ended with the breaking of bread in the service of communion, in which the entire community affirmed its faith and prayed for the new leadership.

In an important public pronouncement Dr Peter expressed his commitment to continuing CMCH's policy of giving priority to the care for the needy and marginalised members of society.

We should also take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation for the contribution that the past Director, Dr Sunil Chandy, has made during the past five years. Dr Chandy oversaw and guided the Institution during a period of great change and even greater challenges. He has left an enduring legacy, as expressed not only in the vigorous Christian ethos of the institution, but also in the bricks and mortar of the new hospital in Kannigapuram. Dr Chandy visited Melbourne on a number of occasions, lastly for the annual dinner in 2016. The FOVV will miss his charismatic presence, but our friendship will continue. We wish him every blessing in his new post-directorship life.

News from Vellore - The Kannigapuram hospital

During his talk at the annual fundraising dinner Hugh Skeil reported on the progress being made in the construction of this vast new hospital which will have 1500 beds. Since the ground-breaking ceremony held on 20 December 2016 the progress of the construction crews has been remarkable, as can be seen in the accompanying photo taken in July (much more will have happened since then).



The vision behind the development of this hospital is not only to take the pressure off the main hospital, which is really struggling to deal with the volume of patients that it must treat day in day out. But it also enables the hospital to specialise in trauma cases, and life-style diseases, both of which are becoming ever more common in current day India and for which facilities are badly lacking.

Crisis surrounding the admission of medical students

For many years there has been controversy surrounding the admission of medical students to the MB BS course at Vellore. 17 times there have been court cases and each time CMC has won. The College accepts the validity of the NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) and is willing to admit NEET qualified applicants. But it is not prepared to accept the demand that so-called 'common counselling' will take place. This would mean that the NEET would be the sole criterion and that CMC would not be allowed to apply additional criteria for admission that have been in place for many years, including aptitude tests and interviews, together with the sponsorship system that allots places to churches and mission hospitals, with the understanding that these graduates would return to staff the mission hospitals.

The appeal to the Supreme Court has still not been resolved. The College has taken the radical step of only admitting to this year's course a single student who is a central government nominee.

The College is confident that the court will recognise the force of minority rights in this matter. Nevertheless, the cancelling of nearly all admissions is a severe blow, which could have major repercussions in years to come. We call upon all supporters of CMCH to remember the College in their prayers in the current critical situation. For the latest news see the website of the Australian Vellore Board, <http://australianfov.net.au>.

From the CMC Vellore archives



*Ida S. Scudder, the
founder of CMC Vellore,
with Mahatma Gandhi,
1928*

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Please detach and send in if you wish to give financial support to the work of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore:

Post Cheque or money order to: Treasurer Friends of Vellore, Victoria PO Box 81N Armadale North VIC 3143	Direct transfer or deposit to: Friends of Vellore Victoria Bendigo Bank BSB: 633000 Account: 139185151 Please email details of any deposits to FOVVTreasurer@gmail.com)
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if you wish to give to the Annual Giving Campaign, please select the program/s you wish to fund:

- Development Department Emergency Fund (People)
- Endowment Fund for Allied Health Scholarships (Education)

For further information on this campaign, please contact the Secretary. Please note that all donations via the FOVV are tax-deductible.