



Media Release

10 October 2014

National Breast Cancer Awareness month – Flying Doctor Reports Sharp Rise in Referrals

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in Australia.¹ One in eight Australian women will develop it during their lifetimes, which equates to 14,000 each year.² Less than 200, or one per cent of men, will also develop it.³ Its impact is felt right across many generations and through whole communities.

Some 30 per cent of women diagnosed live outside the major cities⁴ and The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) South Eastern Section is using National Breast Cancer Awareness month to report a recent sharp rise in breast cancer referrals.

“The RFDS is fortunate to have a McGrath Breast Care nurse supported by the McGrath Foundation and the fundraising efforts of Elders staff nationally,” said Linda Cutler, General Manager Health Services at the RFDS, South Eastern Section.

“Jo Beven has been with us for the past three years and supports those in rural and remote areas experiencing breast cancer through home visits. The world’s first “flying McGrath Breast Care Nurse” also holds clinics in 18 remote locations across three states, a huge area covering 640,000 sq kms, maintains contact with diagnosed patients in various stages of treatment and gives advice over the phone.”

In the past 12 months she has made 188 patient contacts and made 403 phone contacts, up 178 per cent on last year. In her first year she made 132 consultations in just three locations, indicating how far the service has come in a very short time.

Jo feels the sharp increase in referrals is due to a number of factors. “Broken Hill women are getting the message, having more regular screening mammograms and I’m also becoming better known about town,” said Jo.

“I have a very good working relationship with BreastScreen NSW, who I work with on assessment clinic days. It is a government funded program which provides a free screening mammogram every two years to women from the age of 40. This provides a good introduction for my RFDS work and meeting people at the point of diagnosis enables me to better support them on what can be a long and difficult journey.”

¹ Breast Cancer Statistics, Cancer Australia <http://canceraustralia.gov.au/affected-cancer/cancer-types/breast-cancer/breast-cancer-statistics>

² National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Report to the nation 2010

http://canceraustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/bcncr-breast-cancer-report-to-the-nation_504af02ab3e14.pdf

³ As 1

⁴ As 2

“The RFDS is also being more proactive, using technology, such as text, Skype and email, to maintain patient contact and provide information. During National Breast Cancer Awareness month I’m encouraging women to download the McGrath Foundation’s Curve Lurve app to help them check their breasts in three simple steps that we call look, lurve, learn.”

“While all these positive efforts have increased referrals, they have mostly been from populated areas. Referrals are at a minimum for Outback women with no new ones received for over 18 months. Ensuring they are aware of and making use of the services I offer is an ongoing challenge.” Added Jo.

Despite her busy schedule Jo will be supporting the breast cancer awareness campaign, which Broken Hill is taking very seriously. A “Turn the town pink” campaign will see pink ribbons on trees and light poles. Shops will be decorating their fronts, changing their lighting and citizens will be wearing pink. On Saturday, 11 October the Broken Hill Breast Cancer Support Group will be holding a “Pink Ball” in the town.

RFDS staff will be wearing pink and hosting a morning tea on 10 October, in support of Jo and her work in raising awareness of breast cancer.

The RFDS have put up pink paraphernalia around the Base and the Visitor Centre shop will be promoting our pink products to visitors and encouraging awareness of the cause.

The RFDS message to women during National Breast Cancer Awareness month is to regularly self-examine, have a mammogram every two years from age 40 and to go for regular medical checks, particularly if there is a history of breast cancer in the family.

“They should contact their doctor if they have any concerns. Awareness and early detection can make all the difference,” said Jo.

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For more information or photographs, contact:

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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section flew the equivalent of 6.25 round trips to the moon as it conducted over 5,000 clinics, took over 6,000 telehealth calls, had over 53,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,400 patients.