



Media Release

12 May 2014

## **Newcastle Dentists to Brush Up Dental Education in Outback**

Hunter dentists, David and Jenny Hancock, leave Newcastle on Monday to join over 300 other participants in the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Outback Car Trek, a fundraiser for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) featuring vintage pre-1978 cars.

The Outback Trek has raised over \$21.5 million since its inception in 1990. Last year it raised in excess of \$1.5 million, an amount it hopes to match or even better this year when the Trek leaves Alice Springs on June 2 and travels over 6,000 kms to Margaret River in Western Australia via Broome. The 2014 Trek will take 12 days in total, the cars travelling an average of 500km per day.

“A portion of the money raised will be used to support The Outback Oral Treatment and Health (TOOTH) program, which has enabled the RFDS to deliver much-needed dental services to remote Outback communities in NSW,” said David.

TOOTH, which also receives significant funding from the Investec and Gonski Foundations, takes dental clinics and dental therapy clinics to the remote western NSW communities of Bourke, Collarenebri, Goodooga and Lightning Ridge. Over the past two years, TOOTH has treated 3,485 patients.

Travelling through rural and remote communities of the Outback in a 1974 Peugeot 304, kindly donated by fellow trekker David Hicks and sponsored by Investec Bank, the pair will be handing out free toothbrushes and toothpaste, as well as doing some dental education work along the way.

“David and I have done volunteer dental work on the TOOTH program in the past and we’ll be doing our bit again to help promote dental health during the Trek,” said Jenny.

Oral disease continues to be one of the most widespread yet preventable health problems in Australia. Dental conditions in some remote areas of NSW have recently been compared to those found in developing countries, making it clear why the TOOTH program is such a vital service.

“The statistics are bad, but it doesn’t really hit home until you see it first-hand. Most Australians living in cities would be unaware of the poor dental standards in Outback Australia,” said David.

“When TOOTH began two years ago dental health in Outback NSW was being likened to that in the developing world, but great strides have been made since then. The last quarter results from TOOTH showed that preventative and restorative services (e.g. fillings) increased by over 10% on last quarter, while oral surgery items (e.g. extractions) decreased significantly.” Said Lyn Mayne, Senior Dentist for the RFDS.

“Remote and rural communities still experience a higher proportion of dental decay than metropolitan residents, however, promisingly, untreated dental decay is decreasing. There was also a drop in the overall decayed teeth score, marking an important overall improvement in dental health.” Lyn added.

In keeping with the RFDS’ commitment to improving rural health, the TOOTH program also provided clinical placements for 33 dental and 15 health therapist students from Charles Sturt University as well as eight health therapists from Sydney University during the past year.

“The training and development of rural students is vital to improving the recruitment and retention of oral health professionals in rural and remote areas. Students trained in regional Australia are more likely to return to those areas after graduation,” said Lyn.

To keep up to date with the Trek or to make a donation, visit [outbackcartrek.com.au](http://outbackcartrek.com.au) or [flyingdoctor.org.au](http://flyingdoctor.org.au)

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For more information or photographs, contact Brendon Smyth, RFDS (South Eastern Section) General Manager, Fundraising, Marketing & Communications, 02 9941 8852/ 0438 687 933 or [brendon.smyth@rfdsse.org.au](mailto:brendon.smyth@rfdsse.org.au)

Nick Bleszynski, Media Consultant, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0403 931 291 or [nbleszynski@rfdsse.org.au](mailto:nbleszynski@rfdsse.org.au)

## **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. No patient is more than two hours away from the Flying Doctor’s help. In the past year, the South Eastern Section flew the equivalent of 6.5 round trips to the moon as it conducted over 4,700 clinics, took over 5,000 telehealth calls, had over 54,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,600 patients.