

INFORMATION ON DANDENONG AND DISTRICT HOSPITAL

The Dandenong and District Hospital came about as the result of the work of a committee formed in 1937 following a spirited editorial in the Dandenong Advertiser. (The Dandenong Advertiser is still in business - not as a newspaper these days but as a printing business run by Peter Goldberg and Ray Williams - in fact Dandenong Advertiser Printery does most of our hospital's printing.)

The editor of the paper was Mr. Jim Swords and his brother, Robert, was the Chairman of the committee and driving force behind the successful fundraising which, with Government support, saw building start on the corner of Cleeland and David Streets in 1941.

At that time there were no houses between the market and the hospital site, David Street was unmade and herds of cattle were driven along Cleeland Street to the Market.

Robert Swords was killed in action with the R.A.A.F. and did not live to see the hospital open its doors for business in

1942.

The need for a hospital in Dandenong had been apparent for many years previously.

In 1919 the state school was turned into a temporary hospital to look after the victims of the Spanish Influenza epidemic which swept the world following the 1st World War.

The medical officer of the Shire of Dandenong - a huge municipality in those days - was a Dr. Langley and he was quoted in the South Bourke and Mornington Journal calling for the establishment of a hospital for the area although it was many years before his words were heeded.

Before the Dandenong and District Hospital opened in 1942, the only other hospital in the town was Murray House.

During 1937 a meeting was held of the newly-formed committee to which they invited a Mr. McVilley from the body which was the forerunner of today's Health Commission of Victoria. At

that meeting a decision was taken to go big - they would build a 60 bed hospital capable of taking care of the needs of the area until at least 1990.

With the benefit of hindsight we can now laugh at their estimate of "big". Here in 1985 we can see that 331 beds is quite inadequate, never mind 60!

Immediate post-war expansion saw a huge increase in the population of this area and this boom has not faltered so that we remain in one of the 3 major growth areas of the State.

To keep up with this population explosion, the hospital embarked on an expansion program which saw the building first of Centre Block followed by South which opened in 1977.

North - a pre-fabricated "temporary" building housing long-term orthopaedic patients - is now about 14 years old and currently feasibility studies are being looked at by the Government to see if the ward can be replaced.

Dandenong and District Hospital has grown from a little community hospital which cost around \$15,000 to run in its first full year of operation to a major general and acute hospital with an annual budget around \$28 million.

That increase has taken place in just 43 years. During that short time more than 50,000 babies have been born in the hospital making it the 5th largest maternity hospital in the State with about 2,000 births a year.

Another record which saddens rather than gladdens us is that we appear to receive more road accident victims than any other hospital in the State including Royal Melbourne Hospital, St. Vincents and the Alfred.

Our Casualty Department is one of the State's busiest and this has been recognised by the Health Commission so that we hope in the not too distant future to modernise and expand our emergency services.

These days Dandenong and District Hospital has a number of highly specialised areas - including Pathology with its scientists and technicians carrying out around 350,000 sophisticated tests each year using modern computerised equipment and Organ Imaging, which used to be called X-Ray in the old days, but now uses ultrasound, image intensifiers, angiography and other highly technical procedures as an aid to diagnosis. We also have Coronary and Intensive Care with their specially trained staff and modern equipment and the Special Care Nursery where premature or sick new born babies are looked after with good old-fashioned tender loving care assisted by modern equipment.

Other areas utilising modern technology include the Medical Library with its direct computer link with the Australian National Medical Library in Canberra, Medical Records where patient details are stored on computer files and a host of computer programs which assist the management team.

Despite the increasing use of technology, much of the work done in the hospital is still the traditional care of patients and this never stops. In fact an increasing number of elderly nursing-dependent patients has seen a great increase in the nursing workload and this will remain high until more nursing home beds are provided for the area.

More rehabilitation facilities are also needed in the area to free hospital beds for more urgent cases.

Shortage of beds remains a major problem leading as it does to cancellation of elective surgery and inability to admit many people who are treated in casualty and then sent off to other hospitals.

The hospital's Committee of Management has constantly brought this to the attention of the Government and the Health Commission of Victoria, but so far with no success. The Government believes that moving the Queen Victoria Medical Centre to Clayton is going to solve the problem in this area but our own view differs from this.

We have around ^{2,000}~~1,500~~ people on our payroll and this makes us the largest employer in the City of Dandenong. We are probably one of the greatest users of services in the City also and it pleases us that we get such wonderful support from the Dandenong Council and also from the community we serve.

Local service clubs, sporting clubs, community groups and our own auxiliary members all contribute to their hospital with time, money and most importantly moral support.

In an ideal society we would need only Government funding to run the hospital but in our far from perfect world the need for community support has never been greater - not so much for running costs but to keep up with the constant need for new equipment to ensure we maintain the very high standards of care and treatment for which we have become recognised.

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