

COMPREHENSIVE EPILEPSY PROGRAM MAKING A DIFFERENCE

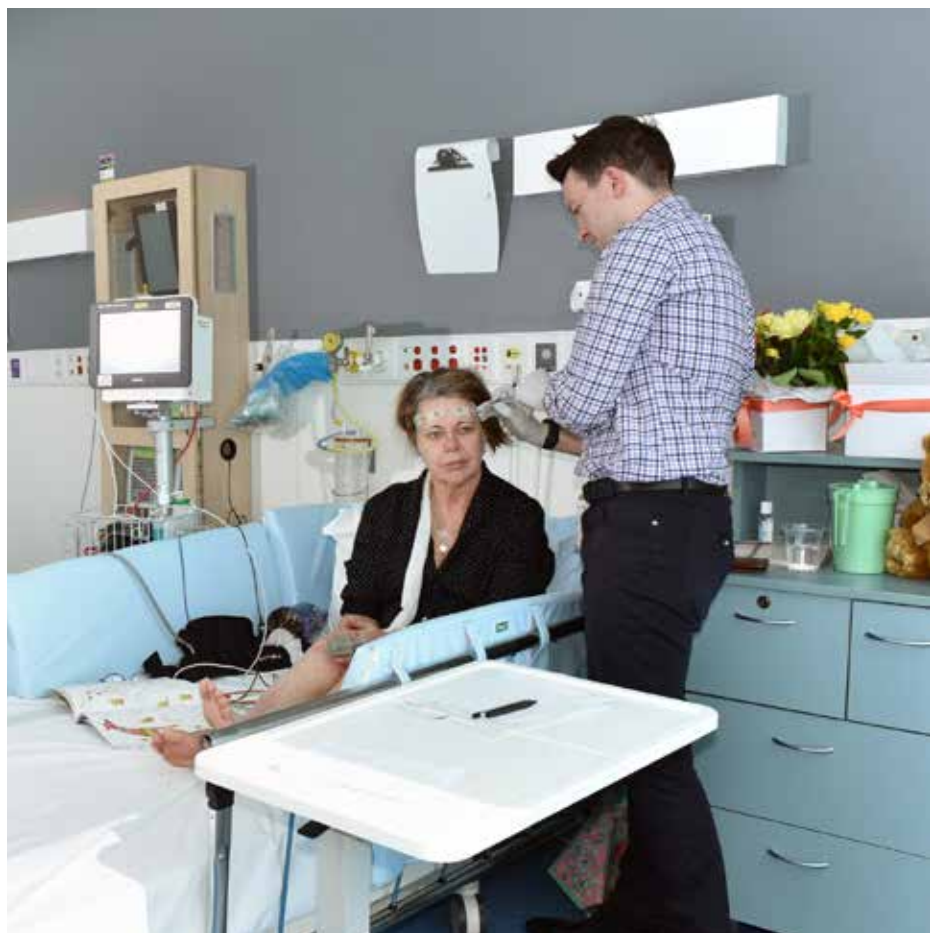


Julie Grantham is about to sit her driving test again. She is 55 years old. “When I had to stop driving six years ago because of my epilepsy, I sold my car,” she states. “I never thought I would be in a position to use it. But now I am 12 months on from my epilepsy surgery at the RBWH, I am seizure-free and have recently been cleared for driving.”

Julie is a primary school teacher with two grown-up children and two grandchildren. She had lived with epilepsy for many years, but by her 50's her epilepsy stopped her from working. She was having frequent seizures despite multiple antiepileptic drugs and living alone added another element of concern for her safety. When she was evaluated at the RBWH and found to be suitable for epilepsy surgery, she leapt at the chance. “The work-up was so thorough I didn't actually feel too apprehensive. I felt great confidence in the team,” Julie said. She was also closely supported by the dedicated team of RBWH epilepsy nurses. “They were always accessible, by phone, email, or face to face if I needed. It was very reassuring to have them, from start to finish,” she recounts.

“Too few Queenslanders have been considered for epilepsy surgery in the past, due to an incorrect assumption about who is eligible and can benefit” said Prof David Reutens, Director of the RBWH Comprehensive Epilepsy Program. “All people with epilepsy in Queensland, including those from regional and remote areas, should have access to the





best options for complex epilepsy care. That's why a public state-wide service was set up." The RBWH program offers a full range of diagnostic tools including long term video EEG monitoring, intracranial EEG, and state of the art imaging, with high-resolution MRI, nuclear medicine scans such as SPECT, PET and functional MRI. The multidisciplinary team consists of professionals in many disciplines (including six epilepsy specialists). The team meets every week at a case conference to formulate an expert consensus opinion of the best management option available for candidates for surgery, carefully going through the test results. "International experience has shown that the combination of expertise from different specialists focusing on complex cases results in better patient outcomes," Prof Reutens states.

He also notes, "Not everybody will be suitable for epilepsy surgery, and not everyone will want to go down that road. That's why we also have an active Clinical Trials program, so that our patients can have access to the newest anti-epileptic drugs and other devices in development."

Kimberley Irwin has been coordinating the program since 2013. She remarks "What I like about coordinating the Clinical Trials is that it gives people with epilepsy hope. The program also has many research projects in imaging, genetics, neuropsychology and EEG, all trying to pave the way to a future where epilepsy's impact is diminished or eliminated altogether."

Other speciality clinics run by the Comprehensive Epilepsy Program focus on the optimum care of people with epilepsy at different stages of their life: First Seizure clinic for people who have had their first seizure, the Transition clinic for adolescents with epilepsy transitioning from paediatric to adult care, and the Women and Epilepsy clinic, which deals with specific issues relating to epilepsy management during the childbearing years. The Neuropsychiatry clinic is run by Dr. Chris Randall, a psychiatrist attached full-time to the Comprehensive Epilepsy Program. "The mental health care of people with epilepsy is as important as the care of their epilepsy. Studies have shown that improved management of conditions like depression improves their epilepsy as well, so it is vitally important we address these issues," he points out.

Sadly, Julie's father passed away in February. He left her his bronze Honda 4WD. Against all previous expectations, Julie will be able to drive it herself. As Julie lines up next to local teenagers in her suburban Department of Transport, waiting to sit her road rules test, she reflects on her journey and the team at the RBWH, "I am just grateful for all those who have got me to this point. Thanks for everything and keep up the good work!"