

# Children and illness are a fact of life

## HADASSAH HOSPITAL

In Israel and Australia, the standard and availability of medical care are among the best in the world. This didn't occur by chance, but is the result of policies that are historic and consistent with the nature of the societies in which we live.

Our Achilles heel is the Indigenous community, particularly those who live remotely. The commitment to bridge the gap is absolute and despite some significant failures, notably the continuing poor mental health of some Indigenous children and their limited access to medical services, the gap is narrowing.

In Israel and the surrounding territories, the issue is far more complicated. Factors include fewer Arabic-speaking medical and nursing staff per head of population compared to their Hebrew-speaking counterparts, a range of cultural issues including the rights of Palestinian women and children, the lower standard of health care in the territories, and restrictive access to Israeli hospitals because of security measures at border crossings.

As difficult as these issues are, they are not insurmountable partly because of people like Professor Michael Weintraub, the head of Hadassah's Department of Pediatric Hematology, Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplantation.

His principles and work ethic are true of many in Israel, but Hadassah is literally the front line in terms of Palestinian engagement. Geography aside, it is also the spiritual home of that engagement as a result of the groundbreaking work of its founder, Henrietta Szold, more than a century ago.

Professor Weintraub, who is visiting Australia this month, heads a team of 65 physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers and administrators. It will be an opportunity for him to speak with the community about the treatment in Israel of children with cancer and related illnesses and to gain further insights into the work being undertaken in Australia.

The first is the survival rate in Israel of children with cancer. In Israel, as with other first world countries, the success rate is 80 per cent. That means 20 per cent of children will die. The



Kids with cancer have a friend at Hadassah

second is the importance of training Palestinian health workers so that their community will eventually achieve similar outcomes to Israel. He is also cognizant of the number of children who live in developing countries where there is no paediatric oncology, such as the Palestinian territories. The third is how we cope with bereavement, and why supporting families beyond the immediate aftermath of the child's death is so important.

"Across the Western world, the cure rate for children with cancer diseases is about 80 per cent," Professor Weintraub says.

"The bottom line is we cure most children, but the process is very hard. There is a lot of intensive therapy, pain, being away from home, losing your hair, all of which is difficult for the child and the family."

Professor Weintraub is also focused on another troubling statistic; 80 percent of the world's children live in developing countries where there are no paediatric oncology services.

"In most parts of the world, including Australia, the closest Third World country is thousands of miles away," he says. "From Hadassah it is exactly five miles (8km) away in the West Bank."

His department is approached almost every day by Palestinian families with children who

need help. The hospital is ready to accept children from the West Bank and Gaza, but offering treatment is made difficult by political, financial and security concerns.

"Unfortunately the health infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza is limited and relatively unsophisticated by Western standards, so a major part of what we do is to navigate the issues to provide a cure for these children."

Hadassah is the main referral centre in Israel for children with cancer and those that need a bone marrow transplant. Professor Weintraub says his Department treats up to 50 children from the Palestinian territories each year with a variety of cancer-related diseases.

He would like to do more for these children, but the cost of treatment often exceeds what the Palestinian Authority can afford. Thanks to Project Rozana, a multi-faith initiative created by Hadassah Australia, top-up funds are available to support critically-ill Palestinian children in hospital and to up-skill Palestinian doctors, nurses and therapists at Hadassah before they return to their own communities.

Professor Weintraub is a passionate believer in encouraging hospitalised children to maintain as normal a lifestyle as possible. He says this is one key to the process of wellness.

"After their family, the most important part of a child's life is their school," he says. "Making

up for lost school days is critical, but it is also a vital element of the psychosocial program."

Hadassah recognises this and has a highly-regarded school on its campus which is run in conjunction with the Ministry of Education.

Normality is the endgame for children and families, but the reality is that each year around 25 children under his care will lose their lives. A large part of his department's work centres around palliative care.

"Palliative care is an integral part of most big medical centres in Israel," he says. "We come to know the families very well, but the day that a child dies we can no longer be of help as paediatric oncologists."

"Bereaved families need help for a long time."

Because of the many conflicts that Israel has been involved in, it has one of the world's most advanced systems for supporting the bereaved families of soldiers. Unfortunately, no such system of support exists for parents and extended family who have lost a child, even if it was the result of a conflict situation.

"Three years ago we started a project to provide a social worker for the bereaved family for the first year," he says. "We are also lobbying government to change legislation so that parents can receive financial support."

It's hard to see Michael Weintraub as anything other than a tireless campaigner for the kids, his medical degree notwithstanding. Staff, patients and their family are in awe of him, both as an outstanding clinician and as a *mentsch*, a person of integrity and honour.

"I don't see myself as a visionary creating peace in the Middle East," he says. "What we do in our own little corner is to treat the children. A by-product of our work is that Israelis and Palestinians meet each other on a very human level. They have a common enemy – the disease – and together we fight to save the lives of our children."

He represents not only the best of Hadassah but the best of Israel.

*Professor Michael Weintraub's visit to Australia Melbourne from 13 – 17 May and Sydney from 17 – 20 May.*

## A fresh approach to tuition

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Strive provides online one-on-one Maths and English tuition to five to 15-year-olds of all abilities. Strive's frequent short lessons intrinsically allow for retention and understanding of content.

"As teachers we understand the importance of frequency for learning and, as mothers of school aged children, we understand the importance of offering tutoring that can slot into busy weekly routines," said Hayley Traub, co-founder.

Qualified teachers conduct all lessons in real time via video call using premium digital resources aligned with the Australian curriculum.

The Strive teaching approach is based on the latest insights from the world of



Strive Online Education co-founders Sharon Branicki and Hayley Traub

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"Our students engage with the interactive resources and find it is a novel experience to be guided by, and connect with, their online teacher. Engagement and rapport are crucial for learners to reach their full potential," said Sharon Branicki, co-founder.

Strive offers three packages, namely bronze, silver or gold and the cost a lesson will depend on which package is purchased. For best results, three lessons per week, or about 75 minutes of direct tutoring, is recommended – and this could be saving you as much as 50 per cent when compared with traditional tutoring models.

Strive Online Education is passionate

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"We decided we needed to give back to those less fortunate, and we are proud that we can donate part of our income to help underprivileged children become more literate," Hayley said.

To learn more about Strive or to book lessons, go to the website [www.striveeducation.com.au](http://www.striveeducation.com.au) or email [info@striveeducation.com.au](mailto:info@striveeducation.com.au) or call (03) 9008 8989.

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