

Fremantle Hospital and Health Service



Many agencies were put to the test when swimmers entered the water at Cottesloe for the annual swim to Rottnest Island. The semi-military precision of the day had hundreds of people on red alert for anything that might occur. The Rottnest Island Nursing Post (RINP) was one such agency that demonstrated its strategic importance and professionalism as staff enjoyed the “quiet” morning and then embraced the “frenetic” afternoon/evening.

First-class response by RINP staff

10am – the scene was dreamlike, the clear green blue waters of Thomson Bay lapped and parted against the slicing hull of the Rottnest Express arriving as hundreds of boats and yachts swayed in the light, flukey breeze, the thousands on them revelling in the sunny, airless surrounds and the rebuilt, spacious Rottnest Hotel taking on the hue of a circus site with tents, bunting, flags dotting the beachfront, roped off areas herding visitors, officials and support crews in readiness for the swimmers’ arrival. Hundreds poured off the Rottnest Express — holidaymakers, support crews, relatives, drinkers, and, fortunately, doctors, nurses, police, security and other staff-for-the-day.

At the ready amongst the bikini-clad, lissom nubile set to welcome the swimmers a small group in yellow and red were on the beach, clinical nurses Nicola Mawson and Trish McKinlay, registered nurses Grace Hitchen, Lauren Hurst and Heidi Canard were there, on the front-line medical force helping Sports Medicine Australia.

10.10am — the Rottnest Island Nursing Post picnic began. Cup cakes from clinical nurse Genevieve Lewis, a sliced, ready-to-eat pizza from clinical nurse manager David Charlton, biscuit slices from clinical nurse Lynda Ward-Keffer and administrative assistant Lorraine Voss, while enrolled nurse Sally Charlton offered coffee or tea and clinical nurse Ryan Nicholls and clinical nurse manager Rebecca Larsen stuck to the water — a genuine feast for the assignment of your life, a working day at Rottnest Island. Rottnest doctor John Paparo was there along with Dr Aled Williams, director of medical services, Peel Health Campus and Dr Yusuf Nagree, acting director of emergency services at Fremantle Hospital. It was a good time to divvy up the jobs for the planned barbecue to end all barbecues set for 6pm at the home

Ready for action!

The RINP gets an injection of staff for big events — (left to right): Genevieve Lewis, Dr Yusuf Nagree, Dr John Paparo, Bec Larsen, Ryan Nicholls, Lorraine Voss, Lynda Ward-Keffer, David Charlton, Dr Aled Williams.

The first in a series of Bulletins about staff, achievements, departments and events.

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of Rottneest Island Nursing Post manager, David Charlton.

Something to look forward to — a three-hour celebration before boarding the 9pm ferry back to reality.

While the group of doctors, nurses and allied health staff, along with the ambos and police, basked in the quiet beauty of Rottneest, their professional ear was alert to the crackling two-ways reporting all quiet on the western front.

10.30am — at the Communications Centre, next door to the new Dome, Water Police, Rangers, Rottneest Island Authority staff and Security took the “nothing happening” calls as morning tea arrived and the representatives of some of WA’s “finest” relaxed together. Clinical nurse specialist Jude Tunnicliff was musing on an island of serenity — another of our staff either on the beach, at the nursing post or at the command centre, Rottneest at its best. But, organised mayhem was about to hit. All the staff planning, all the preparation to react to any worse-case scenario was about to be put to the test.

11am — at the Rottneest Island Nursing Post the four morning customers were easy — a splinter removed, a GP Consult, a sore knee and a rash, all treated and discharged — but, suddenly, the air was filled with crackling hand-held devices that sent the ambos scrambling, as, simultaneously, the bell on the front door rang out — a young man, blood pouring from a head wound was in the foyer supported by his mate. . . he’d swum into the back of a propeller blade.

For all official personnel, and their volunteers, the day had changed, in an instant.

Over the next nine hours — yes until 8.30pm — the staff in the Rottneest Island Nursing Post went into survival mode as patient after patient arrived on foot, by bicycle or in an ambulance — 31 for the day, two evacuated by Royal Flying Doctor Service, others booked on ferries a day early.

While Doctor Yusuf Nagree and Dr Williams treated the exhausted, hypothermic swimmer, and a woman with chest pain and a history of heart ailments, nurses were treating a man with a broken nose, concussion and vomiting everywhere. The bell rang again — a mother with her four year old wanting to know what was the rash on him.



ABOVE: Jude Tunnicliff surrounded by Water Police and a Ranger at the Communication Centre.

Another round sounded at the door as an 18-year-old limped off his bicycle with a stubbed toe, closely followed by a 25-year-old skateboard victim. People suffering dehydration arrived, an Asthma sufferer choking for air, then a 29 year old man staggered in with a badly cut forehead.

Suddenly, the post took on an ED as beds filled, people sat in the waiting room, all the doctors and nurses were fully occupied when . . .crackle, crackle, crackle . . . “emergency on the beach, suspected hypothermia”. The ambos were off again as the doctors prepared for the potentially life-threatening situation.

Suddenly, it was almost 5pm and the busy staff had a full house. The ambulance returned with a very sick swimmer and the door bell rang again — at 5pm, 5.01, 5.09, 5.45, 5.55, 6.20, 6.40, 6.54 (chest pain, history of heart ailments, another Priority patient). After that a lacerated scalp, a lacerated foot, a skin tear to the foot, nausea and dehydration and finally just before midnight a lacerated knee.

Clinical Nurse Manager David Charlton looked at his watch, it was 8.30pm. All his planning for a nice “thank you” barbecue was out the window with just enough time to get to the ferry to thank the doctors, nurses, allied health staff, the volunteers for all their work. He waved goodbye — and then went back to work. Another Rottneest swim over. Another day in the Rottneest Island Nursing Post’s service to the community.

RIGHT: FHHS staff on the front-line — Grace Hitchen and Nicola Mawson with the winner of the swim.

