

RESEARCH

PhD students get worldwide attention

HEART STORIES

David Czerkies OAM

COMMUNITY

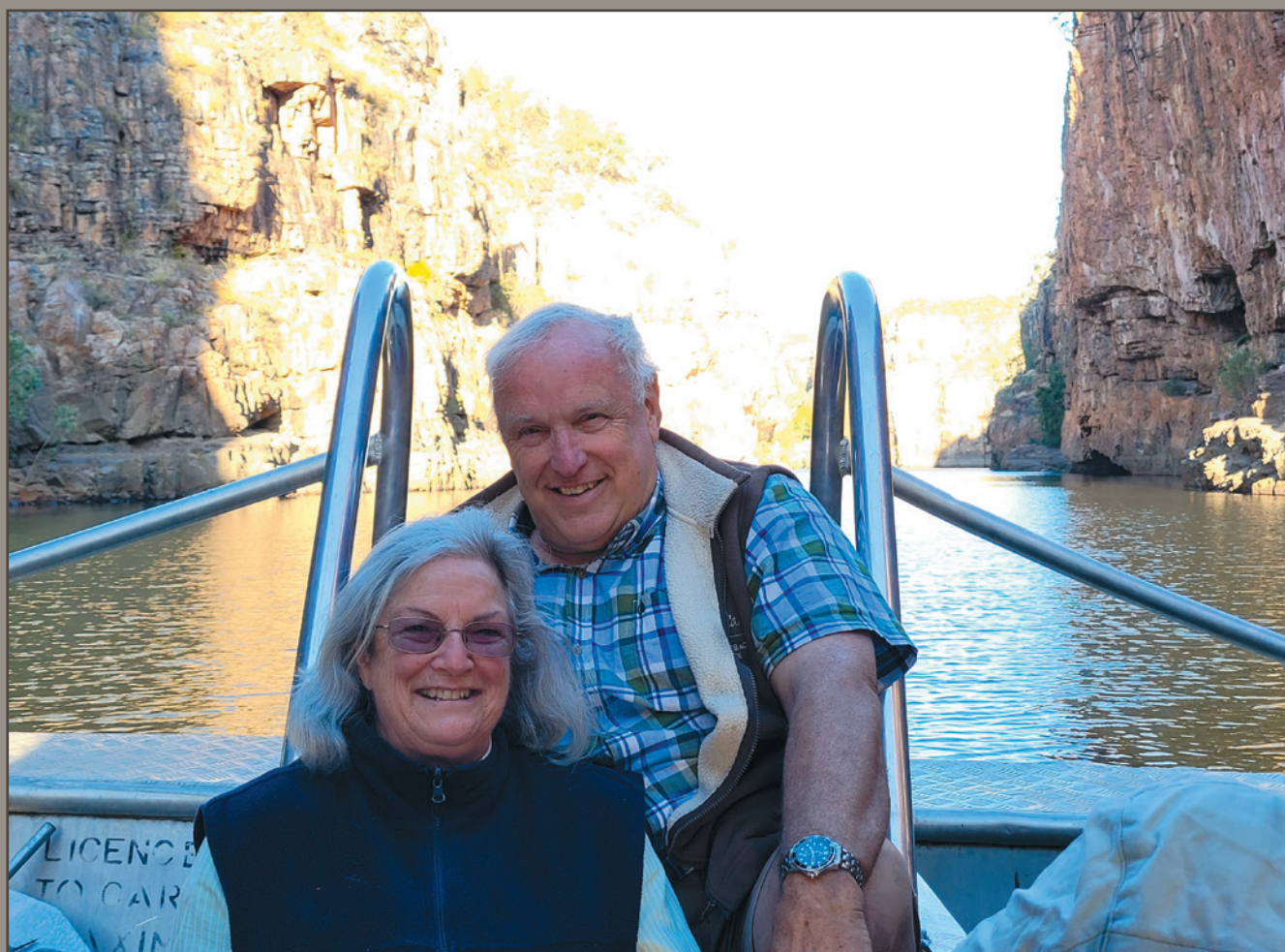
Webinar: The role of heart health in dementia

We Life

NEWSLETTER – ISSUE 2, 2024

Heart
Research
Australia 

What would another 25% of life buy you?



Chris Russell - family man, HROz ambassador, ABC TV presenter, radio personality and podcaster, talks life after a heart attack.

Giving **heart** to the future.

The power of research in creating a better future



Hi, I trust this finds you well.

As the saying goes – time really does seem to fly. I can hardly believe we're about to enter the final quarter of this year!

As we ponder the speed at which life is going, it is wonderful to reflect on the difference that advances in research can make, not only to the length of life, but also to the quality. Inside we have two wonderful stories from heart disease patients - Chris Russell AM and David Czerkies OAM – both of whom have contributed so much to society both before and after their heart events. They are very inspirational.

Our PhD funded researchers are also proving to be inspiring with Dr Karan Rao winning an Early Career Research Prize and Dr Hari Sritharan's projects gaining worldwide attention. You can read more about their success on page 4.

Plus, there's community news and a bit about my journey to CEO of Heart Research Australia.

So, enjoy the read and thank you again for being part of our wonderful community.

Warm Regards,

Nicci Dent - CEO, Heart Research Australia

Meet the team

Meet Nicci Dent, our CEO.

Many of us find the beauty of the Australian landscape inspirational – but not enough to change careers for! Yet for our CEO Nicci who came to Australia as a 24-year-old backpacker, she says “I was so inspired by the amazing forests and wilderness as I travelled around Australia that I went on to volunteer for a conservation organisation, helping to run a walkathon to raise funds to protect them. I found I loved doing this work so much. The idea of being able to contribute to the bigger picture – a vision for a better future - was so compelling that I switched careers - from being a fashion designer in London to fundraiser in Sydney!

I feel very fortunate throughout my career to have worked for some incredible charities, but the definite highlight is being CEO of Heart Research Australia. We have a fantastic, skilled, enthusiastic small team of staff and volunteers, and some incredible donors who are so community minded and generous. So, combined with the talented researchers, together we all make a remarkable contribution to changing Heart Health in the future.

Outside of work you'll find me still travelling around Australia with my husband, in our campervan, which



Nicci ready to go in her recently remodelled campervan

we remodelled last year. We enjoy the great outdoors – walking, swimming, and body surfing but I still have many creative outlets such as mosaicking, painting and cooking. I also try to keep tabs on our two grown sons who are very active and lively and seem to have inherited their parents love of adventure!

Being interested in health and wellness I find it so motivating that every little insight and discovery from the research we fund is helping us to live longer and happier lives.

And I am so grateful you are all on this journey with us – so thank you.

Nicci

PATIENT STORY

DAVID CZERKIES OAM

“I know what death looks like – I have done a number of CPR’s in my career and you do not want to be the one being worked on.”

These are the words of David Czerkies, one of those high achievers who has spent his career helping others. He has an OAM for services to St John Ambulance, was an Army medic, has volunteered his services in incident management control in the Queensland floods, plus he holds a Master’s Degree in Education – yet David still fell into the trap, as many of us do, of thinking that heart disease could not happen to him.



David with his family receiving his Commander of Order of St John from the Governor of NSW.

David knew the signs and ignored them – because as he says, **“I thought I was 6ft tall and bullet proof - and yet there I was - being worked on. Frankly, I have never felt so scared”.**

To end up on the operating table having a stent put in was a big wake up call for me.

For me my heart journey started in my early 40's when I developed Atrial Fibrillation (AF) and blacked out at the gym. If it hadn't been for my colleague telling me **“You don't look too healthy, you are going to see the doctor”-**

I probably wouldn't have sought help because because - why would I? I was only in my 40's and had never smoked and, while I wasn't at peak fitness, I still managed to pass all the army medicals. I was subsequently diagnosed with cardiomyopathy as well as AF. I went on to take medication and have 6-monthly checkups – I modified my lifestyle a bit but really my main concern was ‘will this affect my army career’?

Complacency really crept back in until about 7 years ago – when I was at an army function and started to get uncomfortable heart palpitations. Again – being in denial – I thought a shower would fix it! It was only at the insistence of my boss who said, **“You don't look too hot – you are going to the medical centre and that's an order!”** – that I am still here today. Because I had a 90-95% blockage in my right coronary artery.



David in his role with St John's Ambulance meeting HRH Princess Anne at the opening of the Royal Easter Show in 2022.

It was a big wake up call for me. Since then, I have drastically altered my lifestyle. I have changed my diet; lost weight and I walk 5kms every morning. I have been given another chance to make the most of this life. To enjoy the simple pleasures, of being with my beautiful grandchildren, my wife and my children.

I feel like a fortunate man, and I hope my story will help others who are in my position. The lesson I have learnt is that we really can't take our health for granted, especially as we age. We really need to listen to our bodies and if something doesn't feel right – get it sorted.

And I am eternally grateful to the skills of the medical professionals who look after us – their contribution is priceless, and they deserve all our support.”

3 PATIENT STORY
David Czerkies OAM

RESEARCH **4**
PhD students winning awards

6 INTERVIEW
Ambassador Chris Russell

COMMUNITY **7**
VALE to our first CEO

Contact Us:

Heart Research Australia
PO Box 543
St Leonards, NSW 1590

02 9436 0056
heartresearch.com.au

Follow us on:



@heartresearchaustralia

PhD students gain worldwide attention and win coveted award

As you may know one of the areas funded by Heart Research Australia are scholarships for PhD students, whose research is supervised by some of Australia's leading cardiac researchers. We see this as investing in the future of cardiology, as these scholarships play an integral role in nurturing and developing some of Australia's most promising heart health scientists.

Here are updates on two of our PhD recipients who are gaining accolades and worldwide attention for their research projects.

DR KARAN RAO - Winner of Early Career Research Prize.

At this year's Australia and New Zealand Endovascular Therapies Meeting (ANZET) meeting, two of the three finalists for the Early Career Research Prize were funded by Heart Research Australia under the supervision of Professor Ravinay Bhindi.

We'd like to congratulate Dr Karan Rao who was asked to present his research on '*Looking at a method to reliably predict patients at risk of heart block following their TAVI procedure*'. Dr Rao went on to win the Early Career

Research prize for this research and it was also included in the Heart, Lung & Circulation and CJC Open journals.

Dr Rao says:

"I would like to thank my co-authors and supervisor Prof Ravinay Bhindi and you, the Heart Research Australia community, for your generosity in making this research possible. You can listen to a message from me at:

heartresearch.com.au/our-researchers/dr-karan-rao".



Dr Karan Rao
presenting his winning research
at ANZET

DR HARI SRITHARAN'S projects reach finals in three competitions.



Dr Hari Sritharan – second from left – with the other finalists for the PCR's Got Talent competition held in Paris.

Dr Hari Sritharan has also just come back from Paris where his project, '*Machine-learning based risk prediction of in-hospital outcomes following STEMI: The STEMI-ML Score*', was a finalist at the international, PCR's Got Talent competition. This project was one of only 6 finalists worldwide chosen for the competition at EuroPCR.

Dr Sritharan was also a finalist for the ANZET Early Career Research Prize this year for an extension of this work.

Dr Sritharan's other research project, also supported

by Heart Research Australia, '*Machine-Learning Based Risk Prediction of Outcomes in Patients Hospitalised With COVID-19 in Australia: The AUSCOVID Score*' was a CSANZ Clinical Trials Prize finalist. Dr Sritharan and his supervisor, Prof Ravinay Bhindi, have lead the national, multicentre AUS-COVID study and have had many papers published on this study in reputable medical journals such as the Medical Journal of Australia, which you can read about here:

heartresearch.com.au/our-researchers/dr-hari-sritharan/

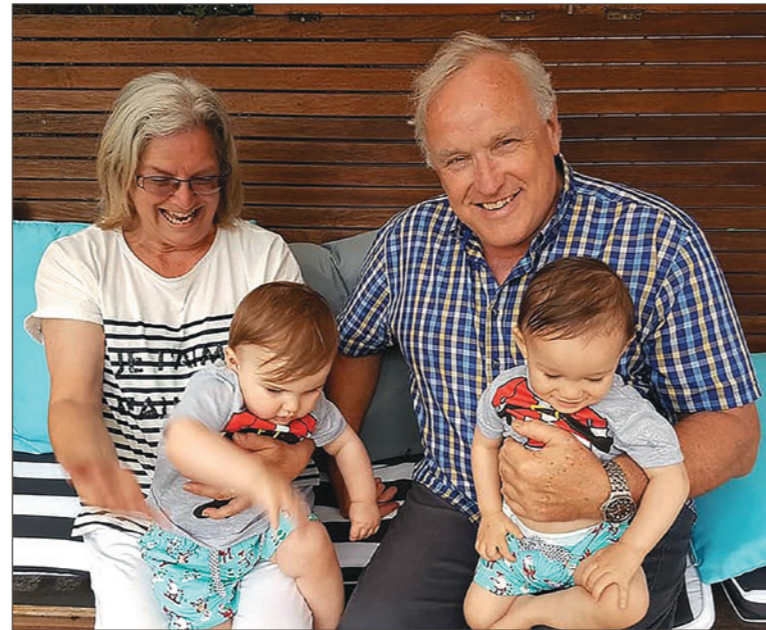
Our congratulations go out to both Dr Rao and Dr Sritharan on their success, and we are excited to be helping fund these research projects which could have a significant impact on health outcomes in the future.

What would another 20 years of life mean to you?

In real terms it is: ❤️ 2 decades of life ❤️ 7,300 days ❤️ 1,040 weeks and ❤️ 174,720 hours.

And while the statistics are mind blowing, the true value is measured, not just by numbers, but by a life well lived. Just ask HROz's first ever ambassador – Chris Russell. Chris had a life-threatening heart attack at just 51 years of age in May 2004. He was having a fun day boating with friends on the Hawkesbury River, when he fell into the cold water – and in an instant his life changed. He had a potentially fatal heart attack and was saved by two things: the insistence of his wife Gill who, having been a nurse, recognised the signs of heart attack and took action; and the advancements in research which saw Chris benefit from being one of the first recipients of an ETAMI (Early Triage of Acute Myocardial Infarction) - a study which was being funded by Heart Research Australia.

This study equipped ambulances so patients could be assessed and triaged in the ambulance using an ECG machine. The diagnosis was then sent to the waiting cardiac team via mobile phone, so they could be prepared and waiting for the patient on arrival. ETAMI saves significant time (up to 100 mins) from incident to treatment and saves heart muscle from irreversible damage by opening up the coronary artery earlier – and as the saying goes – “time is muscle” in the heart world.



Chris and his wife Gill with their grandsons

were always supposed to be and, the ultimate joy, has been getting to know and enjoy our three grandchildren.

I also have had a chance, I could so easily have missed, to bring my varied career as an agricultural scientist and communicator to a satisfying retirement. As post heart attack and in the last 25 years, I have had an unexpected role as an ABC Television presenter, radio correspondent and podcaster. I was also humbled by a nomination by my peers, and then appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2018 for my work in advisory, developmental and research roles and as a mentor and innovator.

Yet in essence it really comes back to gaining back that precious time with your loved ones – that is priceless and that is why I try and help raise awareness and funds for heart research whenever I can. What drives me is the desire to help others fulfil their life's potential – just like me.

We at HROz would like to thank Chris so much for his time and energy which is freely given. Many of you will have seen Chris running our webinars and MCing our events. He never fails to help translate complicated research into something we can all understand, and we are so grateful.

Supported by Heart Research Australia, the pilot studies of ETAMI and SALAMI (stents as alternative to drug therapy) have:

Cut heart-attack mortality rates at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital from 30% to a world-beating 2% and has been rolled out across Australia.

For Chris he says, “I'd had a wonderful life. I had been so lucky and born in a lucky country. Yet had I died 20 years ago I would have missed out on so much love and enjoyment. I was at the stage in my life where you get time to enjoy those things that matter most to you. The fruits of your labour, if you like. It would have been like an athlete training for the Olympics but not getting to compete!

Since then, I have got to spend another 20 years with the love of my life, my wife Gill - to whom I have been married now for 48 years. I have seen my children, who were in their late teens then, grow into the wonderful people they

Vale, Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths Founding CEO of HROz

It's with great sadness that we bring the news that our founding CEO and Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) recipient Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths has died aged 101.

After an illustrious career as a naval officer, Guy took on the task of setting up Heart Research Australia - armed with just a desk (that had only 3 legs), a chair and a piece of paper.

To read more about this Australian icon visit our April 2023 newsletter: heartresearch.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/HROz-April-23-Newsletter-FINAL-Web-1.pdf

Vale Guy, and thank you for establishing our charity which has raised over \$35M to advance research into heart disease and has saved countless Australian lives.



Upcoming webinar: The role of heart health in dementia



Dr Miranda Say

We are excited to be hosting a webinar at 11am on the 25th September featuring Clinical Neuropsychologist, Dr Miranda Say. Dr Say specialises in dementia. She has a special interest in how heart health plays a role in brain health, and in dementia in particular. She will be discussing cardiovascular risk factors and how they affect the brain.

Don't miss what will be an incredibly important and interesting webinar. You can join us or receive the link for the recording by scanning the QR code or by going to:

heartresearch.com.au/heart-health-club-webinar/



Play for Purpose – HROz Ticket buyers win big!



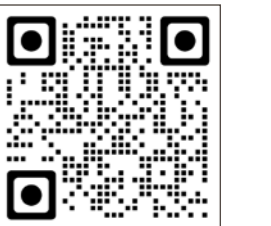
As they say - you have to be in to win!

And in Play for Purpose Game 23 HROz ticket buyers have won big!

There were 14 Heart Research Australia winners in total including:

- ❤️ **2nd prize** - \$15K Woolworths WISH voucher to our winner from Victoria
- ❤️ **3rd Prize** - \$7.5K in Travel Associates voucher to our winner from ACT

So now it's your chance to **join the other 224 Heart Research Australia winners from previous raffles**, as Game 25 has just opened! And, as you can see, the odds are great!



To buy a ticket in the latest game scan this QR code or go to:

www.playforpurpose.com.au/heart-research-australia



I have, WILL you?



We are so grateful to everyone who shares our vision by leaving a gift in their Will to Heart Research Australia. One of those kind people was the late Anthony Byrne. Mr Byrne became very interested in the work of Heart Research Australia in 2001, after having

his own heart issues and needing a pacemaker. After a number of years of making one-off donations, he decided to take his support a step further, by leaving a gift in his Will.

Mr Byrne sadly passed away last year. At various times he was known to be a musician, a jeweler, an artist and a wordsmith. He had a keen interest in the theatre, was an avid reader of the classics and loved history, especially that of ancient Rome and Greece and the UK. We are so thankful to him for his kind and generous gift - a legacy which will help to improve the lives of those who come after him.

We are also deeply thankful and pay our respects to all donors whose legacy was received in the 23/24 financial year.

The Estate of the Late:

*Anthony John Byrne
Audrey Stamp
Beryl Percival
Ian Bersten
Janette Elizabeth Hamilton
Janice Green
Joan Eileen Luke
John Desmond Hinson
John Michael Landy
Lesley Nott
Leslie Geoffrey Kay
Leslie John Logue
Lois Wylie O'Brien
Paul Dawson Leslie
Ross William Lindsay*

For more information about leaving a gift in your Will, please go to heartresearch.com.au/gifts-in-wills or contact Diane van de Merwe on (02) 9436 0056 or bequest@heartresearch.com.au

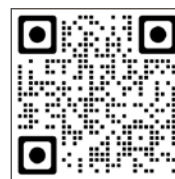
Did you know that Online Wills are a simple and affordable way to write a Will?

We have partnered with these two providers who may be able to assist.

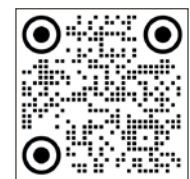
Legal advice is recommended if you would like to discuss your individual needs and for more complicated situations.



gatheredhere.com.au/c/heart-research-australia



www.safewill.com/hroz



Thank you so much! Any legacy, small or large will have a positive impact on generations to come.