

# AJMF NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH MEDICAL FEDERATION | [www.ajmf.org.au](http://www.ajmf.org.au) | AUTUMN 2015

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT AJMF (VIC)

At our AGM in November, we heard from Dr Yayu Mekonnen, who is being trained in Israel by Save A Child's Heart (SACH) to become the first Ethiopian Pediatric Heart Surgeon in his home country. The following week Dr Mekonnen announced his engagement to Melbourne-born Cynthia Fayman. The young couple requested donations to SACH in lieu of gifts for their planned engagement party (which became their wedding celebration), and enough funds were raised to cover the costs of bringing an eight year old Ethiopian boy to Israel to repair a heart defect. They are a very special and inspiring young couple.

The mini-conference at the Novotel on the Geelong waterfront over the Labour day long weekend in March was a great success. As any Jewish mother would know, the success of any Jewish function depends on the quality of the food. We were treated to superb kosher catering supervised by our mashgiach, Danny Miller. The organisation of the conference was underpinned by the amazing behind the scenes work of our administrative whizz, Annette Hayman.



Darryn Lyons, Mayor of Geelong, at the AJMF Mini-Conference



Yayu Mekonnen and Miriam at the AJMF AGM

The conference was opened by the Mayor of Geelong, Darryn Lyons, who in his flamboyant style regaled us with some of the local history and his passion for establishing Geelong as a cultural and business centre.

On Shabbat we enjoyed the hypothetical "If you are not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space" moderated by the inimitable Paul Fineberg, which provoked some lively discussion before our Shabbat lunch. Two walking tour options, led by local Geelong personality, Colin Mockett, were scheduled for the afternoon. Fitter participants enjoyed the glorious autumn sunshine as they walked along the waterfront to the botanical gardens, while others selected the shorter tour of the foreshore with its famous painted bollards. Our evening trivia quiz was run by quizmaster extraordinaire, Matthew Cohen.

Of course the Sunday morning medical presentations were of the usual high standard. Topics varied from colorectal cancer, transgender health, haematology, hair transplantation to breech presentations. We were excited to be joined by two medical students, Nadav Harel and Jeremy Moskovitch, who spoke about current issues in medical education. Our thanks to our 10 presenters for

their informative addresses and to Ronni Chalmers of CBG Asset Management for sponsoring the conference and providing us with his views on investments.

As the convenor of the conference, it gave me special naches to have younger doctors attending with their families who remembered coming to AJMF conferences as children with their parents.

Based on the very positive feedback received after the mini-conference, we have decided not to proceed with the longer biennial summer conference in January 2016, and will plan another mini-conference in March 2016. We plan to make contact with the Australian Jewish Psychologists and Alpha Omega (Jewish Dentists) with a view to expanding the scope of the conference and encouraging connections with other professionals.

### Forthcoming functions

We are pleased to advise that Professor Sam Berkovic AC and Professor Ingrid Scheffer AO, who jointly won the Prime Ministers Prize

*Continued on page 2*



Matt Cohen introducing the Saturday night trivia quiz

for Science in 2014 for their research into epilepsy and genetics, have agreed to speak to us in the evening on Sunday 30 August. Their topic will be "The Prime Ministers Prize for Science - Medical Research and Clinicians".

We are also planning a family day (with kosher lunch provided) on Sunday 15 November at The Enchanted Maze Garden on the Mornington Peninsula. Full details of our upcoming functions will be emailed to those members who have provided us with their email address and will also be posted to our website closer to the date.

This year we are supporting two Israeli physicians who are working here on fellowships. Dr Nir Hirshoren, from Hadassah in Jerusalem, who is working in head and neck surgery at Peter MacCallum and Dr Maayan Gruber from Haifa, who is working in Paediatric Otolaryngology at The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.



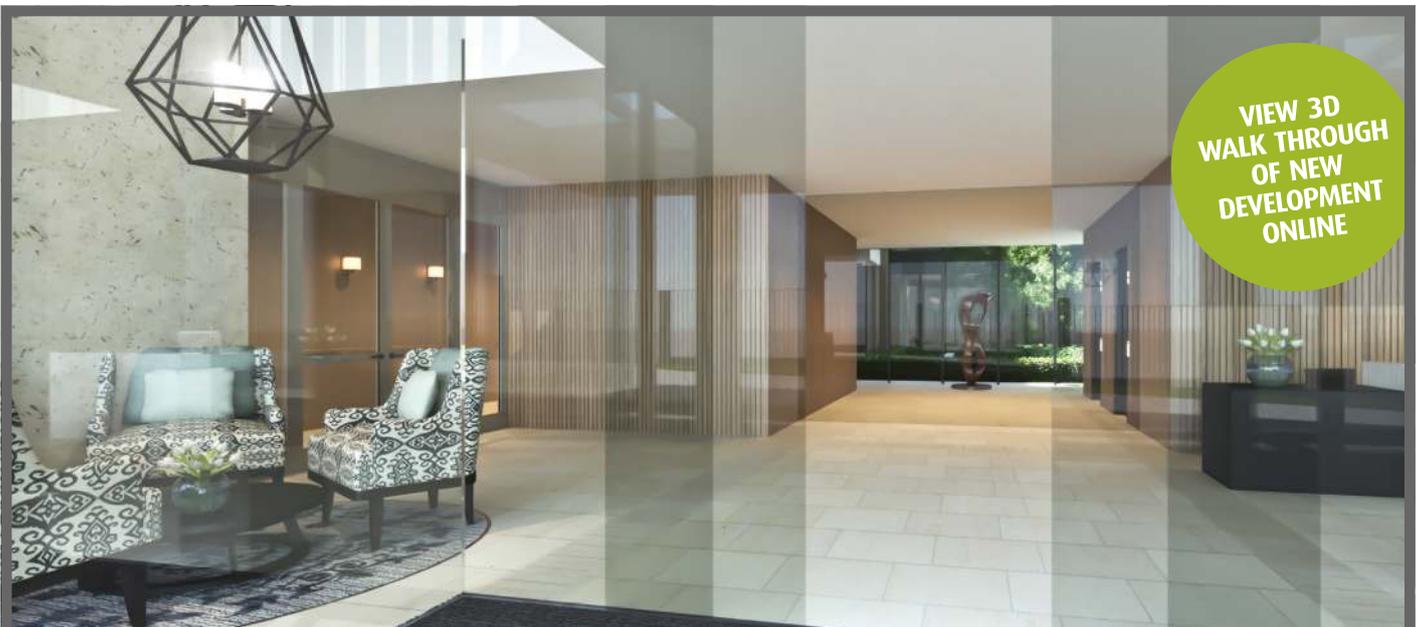
Geelong Mayor and Mayoress, councillor Eddy Kontelj with some AJMF committee members

As I write this report the recent earthquake in Nepal has led to the loss of life over 7,000 people with another 10,000 people injured and many thousands displaced and homeless. The Australian Government and various humanitarian organisations have dispatched rescuers and aid to the area. Israeli paramedics arrived

early on the scene and the plane used to transport a Magen David Adom team to Katmandu was subsequently used to transport five new born babies and their families back to Israel for further treatment and care.

**Dr Miriam Kuttner**

President AJMF (VIC)



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# FROM SHAARE ZEDEK TO ROYAL WOMEN'S

By Shunit Armon

*AJMF have financially supported Shunit in her fellowship in Melbourne*

Shalom!

My name is Shunit Armon. I am a gynaecologist from Shaare Zedek Medical Center and in the last eight months I have been training as an oncology fellow at the Royal Women's Hospital.

I grew up in Jerusalem, and went to medical school in the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva. I continued onto internship and then to Obstetrics and Gynaecology residency in Shaare Zedek. Throughout these years I happily married David and had four beautiful children.

During this time I had the opportunity to work in a unit with a focus on Gynaecological Oncology under the supervision of Professor Uzi Beller. This brought me to decide to proceed on to further training in the subspecialty of Gynaecological Oncology. The importance of a comprehensive training program for physicians interested in becoming Gynecological Oncologists cannot be over emphasized.

The relatively small population in Israel, together with the multiplicity of hospitals, makes it difficult for a young doctor to gain the needed skills. Calls were made, arrangements were done, (heaps of) forms were sent, and I took off with my family from our kibbutz in Gush Etzion to the great city of Melbourne.

At the Royal Women's I have the opportunity to receive highly qualified training and take part in an excellent team under the supervision of Professor Orla McNally.

Nurses, gynae-oncologists, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, physiotherapists and others, are all working together aiming to provide professional and compassionate care. With a multidisciplinary approach we are trying to look at the woman as a whole and direct intervention to different aspects and issues that arise during their care.

The first step is diagnosis, where here I am exposed to advanced imaging techniques and highly qualified pathology systems. Then a plan for treatment is made with discussion at a multidisciplinary meeting. Treatment might involve advanced surgery, where the aim is to perform it endoscopically when possible, so recovery is enhanced. This may be followed by adjuvant treatment when indicated. In addition, genetic testing is offered in certain cases of ovarian cancer to diagnose inherited disease. This diagnosis enables us to offer patients to take part in clinical trials, and is also important for preventing disease in family members.

A part of the training includes a very interesting project I am starting with Professor Michael Quinn. In this project we address issues that will be impacted by increasing rates of obesity on the practice of an oncology unit.

Meanwhile, our family is enjoying life in Melbourne and Australia's beauty and rare nature's gifts. The children are learning in Liebler Yavneh College where they are

accepted with open arms, and we thank them for that. They are learning English, making new friends and playing footy. This is also an opportunity for all of us to expand our knowledge and to encounter other cultures. That is an enriching experience, especially for kids growing up in a small kibbutz. It goes without saying how challenging we find it to be away from home at these times.

I would like to end with a great appreciation and thanks to everyone who made this outstanding opportunity a reality. I wish to thank the AJMF for their support that made my training and our stay here in Melbourne possible. The trust and recognition evoke a special responsibility to do the utmost to justify the high expectations and make the best use of this opportunity. When I return to Israel, I hope to use the knowledge and expertise I have gained here to better treat our patients.

Wishing you all a good and healthy new year.

**Shunit Armon**



Shunit and family

# PAEDIATRIC ELECTIVE SHAAREI TZEDEK HOSPITAL, JERUSALEM

By Yossi Abeshouse

*A NSW medical student who has done an elective in Israel supported by AJMF NSW*

I feel privileged to have completed my elective term in paediatrics at Shaarei Tzedek Hospital in Jerusalem, Israel. I undertook this elective under the supervision of Dr Oren Ledder, an Australian trained paediatric gastroenterologist who oversaw my exposure to the numerous aspects of paediatric medicine available in this world class facility. I chose paediatrics because I'm considering this speciality as a career path, and felt this would allow me to deepen my core knowledge in this arena, as well as increase my confidence in treating children. This elective certainly fulfilled my expectations, and represented the fulfilment of a long held passion to advance my medical studies in the Holy Land.

My goals in pursuing an elective in Israel were to forge a closer personal bond with Eretz Yisrael, witness firsthand Shaarei Tzedek's world class medical facilities and patient treatment, experience a Jewish religious hospital environment with a shul and kosher food readily available, begin laying down the foundation for the possibility of working here in the future, be embedded within an environment of such fundamental religious significance, and witness how medicine is practised in a foreign first world country.

During my time here I was fortunate enough to rotate through a number of speciality areas, namely paediatric ICU, gastroenterology, nephrology, respiratory, neurology, emergency, and the medical wards. I attended multiple consultations and clinics, learning about the common and uncommon conditions that affect children. I observed procedures such as gastroscopies, colonoscopies and biopsies, PEG insertions, bronchoscopies and EEGs. I witnessed and was instructed in methods of paediatric procedural sedation and general anaesthesia. Additionally, I observed numerous patients being treated in ED, assisted in taking patient histories, learned practical ways to insert paediatric IVs and take blood and performed physical examinations to rule out significant dangerous medical conditions. I attended general paediatric ward rounds as well as gastroenterology rounds, and sat in on team meetings, journal clubs, and general educational sessions.

Before I arrived at the hospital, I was aware that my Hebrew language skills were far from perfect, and was unsure

whether this would negatively impact the experience. However, due to the many English speaking foreign trained doctors present who generously spent time explaining patient presentations and medical histories, as well as my rapid improvement in Hebrew language skills, I found the elective insightful and educational regardless of my lack of language fluency. Additionally, English is the universal language of medicine, with the majority of textbooks and journal articles in English. As a result, all Israeli doctors attain a high level of proficiency in this language throughout their training.

Aside from the excellent medical exposure I received, as an orthodox Jew, I was very excited to be situated right in the heart of Jerusalem, absorbing myself in the rich tapestry of culture and tradition that characterises this ancient city. This religious culture also permeates the hospital, where kosher food is readily accessible, a synagogue can be found on the 8th floor, many of the doctors are religious, and the values of charity, kindness, and interfaith collegiality are prominent. I feel it's important to highlight that I saw numerous Muslim doctors as well as patients present, and that they were treated exactly the same as their Jewish counterparts. The Muslim patients felt completely safe and comfortable in seeking help in this hospital, in what can be described as a beacon of interfaith unity, tolerance and mutual respect. The lesson that medicine rises above conflict, political disagreement, race or religion is one that I believe is core to the profession, and I feel privileged to have seen this value personified here in Israel.

During my time in the hospital, I also had the opportunity to speak to many doctors from around the world, thus increasing my appreciation for medicine as a global network of shared interests, goals and the pursuance of best practice. In Shaarei Tzedek they strive to construct best practice guidelines based on the latest available research, and I found this permeated all of their clinical practice. To this end, I witnessed journal reviews with vigorous clinical discussions, and speakers hosted from prominent paediatric departments in the US. What this highlights for me is the importance of constantly staying up to date with the latest and most current treatment standards wherever I find myself in the world, the importance of continuous study and the fact that our

patients rely on that currency and expertise.

Another important aspect of patient care that I witnessed was the weaving together of different subspecialties to treat individual patients. This multidisciplinary approach to treatment, involving meetings and discussions between specialists, helped ensure that children received the best possible medical care available. I see this as just another example of the hospital's dedication to best practice standards of care, all of which I found inspirational, educational and fundamental to medicine.

I was informed that the doctors appreciated a medical student making the effort to travel from half way around the world to spend time with them, learning from them and becoming part of the team even if only for a 4 week period. It added to their sense of pride in the hospital, and reinforced their sense of involvement in the global medical community. I felt it was my duty to respect the time given to me at the hospital by absorbing as much information from the medical staff as possible and taking that information and skill with me in my medical career, and secondly by emulating the value they place in student education and continuing that chain of instruction with the students present in whichever hospitals I work.

In summary, I experienced a medically informative and educational elective which highlighted and reinforced several fundamental aspects of medicine, namely that it rises above race, religion or politics, that multidisciplinary care and best practice is critical to optimal patient care, and that continuous education and teaching is a fundamental part of medicine. I leave this elective inspired to emulate these standards of care, a better communicator with a deeper core knowledge of paediatrics. I would strongly encourage other students to consider Shaarei Tzedek Hospital as an elective destination.

I would also like to thank the Australian Jewish Medical Federation for their support of my elective, together with all of the helpful, engaging and fantastic staff that make the Shaarei Tzedek paediatric department the world class facility that it is.

**Dr Joseph Abeshouse**  
Bankstown Hospital, Sydney

# AJMF SUPPORTS MEDICAL ELECTIVE IN ISRAEL

Jessica Elliott is a Victorian medical student that AJMF supported last year

I had the pleasure this year of travelling to Jerusalem to complete a 6 week medical elective in the paediatric department at Hadassah, Har Hatzofim. I have always had a passion for the Middle East and Fertile Crescent, and saw this placement as an ideal opportunity to fulfil this passion and broaden both my medical and cultural horizons.

Despite my enthusiasm, I anticipated this was likely to be a challenging experience for me - I was travelling alone to a country where I did not speak the language, had no family, friends or religious affiliations, and was arriving at a time of escalating conflict between Israel and Gaza. Indeed, the commonest question I encountered in the hospital was 'why have you come here of all places??' The next 6 weeks has helped me answer that question in detail, for despite my initial reservations I now consider my elective in Hadassah to be the best placement of my 6 years of medical studies.

I encountered an entirely different cohort of disease, with bottleneck populations and consanguinity introducing me to conditions I had only ever read about in text books - indeed, I never thought I'd put Familial Mediterranean Fever above appendicitis on a differential diagnosis for abdominal pain!

The normal difficulty communicating with children was exaggerated in my case given their language skills were poor and mine non-existent, leading me to adopt a sleuth-like approach to history taking. I learned a few key words, the importance of collateral history and some impressive mime skills, and have taken to heart the words of one of the Professors at Hadassah - 'it doesn't matter if you can't understand what they are saying, always assume the child is trying to die on you'.

I found the doctors in the paediatric department were much the same as those I have encountered in

Jessica and her supervisor Rivka Brooks



Australia - it seems the enthusiastic 'paediatric personality' knows no international boundaries. The welcome extended to me was warm and instantaneous, with the team seeing eagerly to my education both as a student in the hospital and as a tourist in Israel. I believe it is a reflection of the quality of their company that I was convinced to stay in for several night shifts with the team.

My placement also gave me the opportunity to travel and explore a culturally diverse and historically rich part of the world. Israel is both varied and beautiful, from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, from Eilat to the Golan Heights - one can easily understand its contested place in history. Indeed, the socio-political climate was tense during my stay,

with the day of my arrival coinciding with the ground incursion into Gaza. It was a surreal experience for me, stepping off of a plane into rocket sirens and seeing the victims of terrorist attacks come into our hospital, and while I regret the tragedy of the conflict it came from I value the insight this experience afforded me.

I would like to sincerely thank the AJMF for supporting me in my studies in Israel, and the doctors at Hadassah for their warm welcome - I hold dear the experiences and friends I have made, and look forward to improving my linguistic skills and returning to Israel for a more extended placement!

**Jessica Elliott**

# HEAD AND NECK SURGICAL ONCOLOGY AT HADASSAH

*Nir Hirshoren is a Head and Neck Surgical Oncology Fellow at Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem and has been financially supported by AJMF*

My name is Nir Hirshoren. I'm 39 years old, married to Maya and father to Lyri, Omer and Shaed, 10, 8 and 1.5 years old.

I was born in Hadera, Israel, and raised in a small village called Nordia, 20 Km from Netanya. My mother Pazit was born in Israel in the 1940's to parents of Lituianian descent. My father, Tzvika, was born in Romania and made Aliya to Israel when he was only 2 years old.

My father's parents were the only family members that survived WWII. My grandfather had a wife and six children who were all lost in the Holocaust. He married after the war with my grandmother who survived different concentration camps including the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. They decided to establish together a new family and come to Israel. They had two children, my father being the youngest.

My Mother's parents were survivors of the Lithuanian Jewish community. A major part of their families that stayed behind were lost. My grandmother came to Israel instead of her older sister who did not want to come to Israel. Her older sister and brothers were murdered by the

Nazi regime. She met my grandfather in Israel as both were young pioneers in the Zionist youth movement. My grandfather fought in the newly established Israeli army against the Arab troops between 1947 and 1950. He then moved with my grandmother and a group of pioneers to build a new place called Nes Tziona which is currently a populated city in Israel. They raised three children (my mother is the youngest).

I graduated from the Ort Yad-Leibovich high school in Natanya and joined a special program in the Israel army. I first did my medical studies in the Technion School of Medicine in 1994 and years later joined the Israeli Special Forces as a doctor for another six years. I was in the front line in 4 different wars - two in the territories, one in Lebanon and one in Gaza. I was awarded by the chief of general staff for my service and got a major rank. Maya and I got married in 2002 and for the last four years we have lived in a small village 20km from Jerusalem, called Nes Harim.

I have been working at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem since 2007. I always knew I wanted to

become a surgeon, and ENT has become my favourite specialty. I have completed the six years of ENT training in 2012 and since then working in a full time position at Hadassah Hospital. I have decided to dedicate my professional life helping people suffering from oncological diseases in a public hospital. I'm focusing my learning and training in head and neck cancer and that was the reason for joining the team at Peter MacCallum cancer centre here in Melbourne under the supervision and assistance of Mr Stephen Kleid.

Head and neck surgery is an intensive and extensive field where patients are usually suffering from aggressive disease with relative low survival rates. Yet, surgery is still the main and sometimes the only chance for a cure and it is always exciting to see those who overcome their disease. Head and Neck diseases are unfortunately common in Israel, and the need for well-trained surgeons is great.

I find the head and neck surgical fellowship at Peter MacCallum an honourable program with great case volume with experienced surgeons who train and assist me in being a better surgeon back in Israel.

Coming to Melbourne was a very big change for us as a family. It's exciting and challenging both emotionally and economically. I feel it's a great opportunity and an important step on the way to becoming a Head and Neck surgeon.

Obviously, after finishing the training here, I plan to go back to Israel. I'll keep working at Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem, hopefully with more experience and expertise. I'm looking forward to going back to Israel and help people in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

I will also have the privilege to educate future generations of students and registrars, as well as participating in research activities, just as I did prior to the fellowship.

**Nir Hirshoren**

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**References:**

1. Meikle PJ et al. JAMA, 1999; 281: 249-254. 2. Grabowski GA, J Pediatric, 2004; 144:S15-S19.

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**Dr Miriam Kuttner**  
**President**  
**Australian Jewish Medical Federation**

Dear Miriam,

Magen David Adom is proposing to run an Emergency Medicine course in Israel for Australian doctors. The aim is to allow doctors who have undertaken the course to provide medical support to MDA and to Israel in case of natural disaster or war.

The course would be held for 10 days, in the Dan Hotel in Jerusalem. The date has not yet been decided. A refresher course would be conducted annually in either Israel or in Australia.

Costs would include travel, accommodation and a cost for the course of approximately \$350-\$400 per participant. We need at least 15 doctors for the course to go ahead.

As President of the AJMF, we would really appreciate it if you could circulate this email to all of your members, encourage them to do the course, and ask them to contact Glynis Lipson (in MDA's Melbourne office) or me if they are interested in participating.

I am personally very enthusiastic about doing the course. It will be great to support this excellent initiative and we hope to have a strong cohort from Australia taking part.

Thank you in advance.

Best wishes,  
**Dr Phillip Feren, MDA Melbourne Committee Member.**

*People from other states who may be interested can contact their local MDA office for further information. There will be a briefing in NSW on Sunday June 21st.*

## SAVE THE DATE

**VIC - SUN 21 JUN 2015**  
 The Truth About Medical Marijuana and Israel as a World Leader in the Field  
 Details 9272 5633  
 or info@mdavic.org

**NSW - SUN 21 JUN 2015**  
 7PM @ Wolper Hospital  
 AJMF NSW / MDA Briefing  
 Professional Emergency Training course in Jerusalem  
 Info: ajmfsnw@gmail.com

**VIC-SUN 30 AUG 2015\***  
 Prof Sam Berkovic AC and Prof Ingrid Scheffer AO will speak on The Prime Minister's Prize for Science - Medical research and Clinicians"

**VIC-SUN 15 NOV 2015\***  
 VIC Branch Family Day & Lunch  
 \*Further details to be advised via email and will be posted to the website closer to the date.

**11-14 MAR 2016**  
 Victorian Branch Mini Conference

## AJMF NEWS



Editor: Mark Steiner

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