

Media Release

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The other side of the bed - when the doctor becomes the patient

Dr Ronan Murray is used to spending most of his time in a hospital at a patient's bedside, but he found out first hand just what it was like to be that patient in the bed, recently undergoing life-saving heart surgery.

Dr Murray has been working at Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) for the past 16 years, a specialist in the field of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology; he had never himself, experienced any serious health problems.

That was until November last year (2007) when Dr Murray was treated for pneumonia. He recovered, but standard tests carried out post illness found he was in fact a 'ticking time bomb.'

The tests showed that he had an enlarged heart and an echocardiogram was carried out to ascertain why the heart was in the state it was. It was revealed that Dr Murray had an Atrial Septal Defect (ASD), or put simply, a hole in his heart.

"It came as a complete surprise to me that I had this, as I have always been fit and healthy," Dr Murray said.

"When I was told that I had a hole in my heart and I would need open heart surgery, it was just a total shock. It was just so unexpected," Dr Murray said.

Dr Murray chose to have the surgery at Royal Perth Hospital.

"I felt that in the unlikely event that something was to go wrong during or after the surgery, my chances of getting the most expert care were better at RPH."

As a husband and father to two young boys aged three and five, Dr Murray did not make the decision lightly. He wanted to ensure he was getting the best health care possible, and he was not disappointed.

His open heart surgery went without a hiccup and Dr Murray now requires no further medical attention.

"Working in a hospital you become a bit blasé to things and just assume that patients are getting the care they deserve, so it was nice to get first hand patient experience, and I was pleasantly surprised at just how painless the whole experience was," Dr Murray said.

"All the staff were so professional and diligent in their care for me. They even took the time to explain things to my wife and reassure her," Dr Murray said.

"Everyone from the theatre staff, surgeons, Intensive Care staff, ward staff, and orderlies, were all attentive and helpful, I couldn't fault any of them," he said.

“It was reassuring to see first hand that we really do practice what we preach and work hard to give our patients the best care we can,” Dr Murray said.

Dr Murray would have had the ASD since birth, but if the condition had remained untreated he would have become increasingly unwell, and eventually if left undetected, his heart could have failed completely.

Dr Murray’s surgeon David Andrews said it is not that common to find adults with ASD as the condition was usually picked up in childhood.

Dr Andrews conceded he may have felt a little extra pressure working on a colleague and fellow health professional, but said he went into the surgery as if it was anybody else.

“I performed the surgery the same as I would with any other patient, Dr Andrews said.

“Every time I do an operation I go in there wanting to ensure the best outcome for my patient, regardless of their status, background, or whatever else,” he said.

Dr Andrew’s said the recovery was excellent and Dr Murray was up and out of the hospital in record time.

“He had the surgery on a Thursday and was home just three days later,” Dr Andrews said.

Ronan Murray is now back at work at Royal Perth Hospital and can’t speak highly enough of the professionalism he encountered during his time as a patient. He is looking forward to putting his new-found experience as a patient to good use.

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