Speech

Address By

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

Reception for Kidney Health Australia and presentation of Priscilla Kincaid-Smith Medal

Westmead Hospital, Sydney
18 October 2012

Mr Vin Harink
Chair, Kidney Health Australia

Mrs Anne Wilson
CEO, Kidney Health Australia

Dr Tim Mathew
Medical Director, Kidney Health Australia

Professor David Harris
Head of Sydney Medical School, Westmead Hospital

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, Mr Harink, for your kind words, and thank you for inviting me to this ceremony to acknowledge outstanding leadership in the field of kidney health.

As Patron-in-Chief of Kidney Health Australia, I am very proud of the work that you do to support research into an insidious disease that affects so many people.

The practical and compassionate care you have given sufferers of chronic kidney and urinary tract disease for more than 40 years has truly made a difference to the lives of many thousands of Australians.

Your vision, articulated by Ms Wilson, to save and improve the lives of Australians affected by kidney disease, is simple in concept, but complex in its execution.

One of your most important roles is educating Australians about the incidence and impact of kidney health disease, I note that, there has been a 20% increase in deaths since 2001.

Your work is rendered more urgent by the increasing prevalence of risk factors in our community: being 60, or older, being obese, smoking, suffering from diabetes, suffering from high blood pressure.

One message which simply must cut through, is that kidney disease kills more people every year than breast cancer, prostate cancer or road deaths.

It is crucial that Australians understand the threat, that we are not complacent in regard to this aspect of our health.

My Friends, last year, I visited a wonderful medical clinic in Broome.
Catering mainly for Indigenous patients, it provided a warm caring environment for the people of the Kimberley with diabetes, with doctors and staff dedicated to providing holistic health services, including dialysis and eye care.

It is a model for dialysis programs everywhere, but the fact remains that patients have to travel long distances from their families and communities to get there.

On the day I visited, most patients were women elders – key to their families’ wellbeing – and too far from home for too long.

The cost of kidney disease to our community, financially and socially, is immense: an estimated 12 billion dollars for the decade from 2009 to 2020. Too much.

I know that all of you here today have answers to reducing the impact of kidney disease on our society.

One of those solutions is kidney donation.

As health professionals, you would work daily with patients who desperately need a kidney transplant.

I am fortunate to have been involved in recent years with DonateLife and the Australian Transplant Games.

I know from that experience what a difference organ transplants make.

In the DonateLife’s Book of Life, the huge number of stories about successful kidney transplants is striking.

Christopher, who received a kidney transplant at the age of five and could eat and drink for the first time without being tube fed.

Mick, who reflected that after just “a couple of days, you notice the difference … feeling better within yourself. No more dialysis, you regain your mobility, you can start to plan things, go away”.

It is disturbing that over a thousand Australians were waiting for a kidney transplant in January this year. Most have to wait at least 4 years to receive one.

One Australian every week will die while waiting for that transplant.

For those who do receive a new kidney, the survival rate is high – around 88% of recipients were alive 5 years after their transplant.

In this role, I have a unique opportunity to speak to Australians about these issues.

Rest assured that encouraging people to become organ donors is a recurring theme.

All of these facts and figures will resonate with this year’s recipient of the Priscilla Kincaid-Smith Medal, Professor David Harris.

Kidney Health Australia established the award to honour Professor Kincaid-Smith’s outstanding clinical and scientific achievements and her many years of service to your organisation.

Professor Harris is well known to all of you, and the young among you will correctly refer to him as a “legend”.

Mr Harink has provided a little of his esteemed background in clinical research, into the prevention and management of chronic kidney disease, and his work here at Westmead Hospital.

Professor Harris’s work in examining the initiation of dialysis for patients with end-stage kidney disease has changed worldwide dialysis practice.

His commitment to kidney disease sufferers extends to investigating new therapies, and I look forward to discussing those with him shortly.
Thank you for inviting me to present this prestigious award to a man who has made such an enormous difference to so many Australian lives.