November a month of DHF awards

The Department of Health and Families has scooped the pool in three separate awards ceremonies.

DHF and a number of its staff won several major workforce awards, including the title of National Employer of the Year (Government category) in the prestigious Australian Training Awards.

"While the awards were presented to individual staff and their work units, the acknowledgement is for the entire DHF team, which provides the framework for success. I would like to congratulate and thank everyone for their efforts over the past year," Minister for Health Kon Vatskalis said.

More staff picked up awards at the Chief Minister’s and Aboriginal Health Workers Excellence awards.

At the Chief Minister’s Awards for Excellence in the Public Sector, Tina McKinnon, a Program and Policy Officer with Maternal Child and Youth Health, and Linda Bunn, an Aboriginal Health Worker at Minjilang Health Centre, both won Public sector medals.

At the same event, DHF initiatives to recruit nurses and midwives to the NT, and rolling out an eHealthNT records and primary care information system won the Strengthening Government and Public Administration and Improving Health and Wellbeing categories respectively.

At the Aboriginal Health Worker Awards, Nathan Aucote was an award winner.

"All successful participants in the program have attained a Certificate IV in Frontline Management,” said Minister for Health Kon Vatskalis, who congratulated the graduates for their dedication over the past year.

"All 21 First Line Managers have given freely of their own time to complete the modules between monthly two-day intensive mentoring sessions. The success of this program is a testament to their commitment," he said.

“This is a fine example of how the Department of Health and Families is investing in the Territory workforce and providing high-quality professional development opportunities.”

Alice Springs Hospital Celebrates Top-Level Accreditation

Alice Springs Hospital (ASH) has been awarded a full four-year accreditation from the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS).

"The ACHS is the nation’s foremost independent authority on quality health monitoring,” Health Minister Kon Vatskalis said today.

"This accreditation follows a rigorous audit process and sends a message to the broader community in central Australia that the management and staff of ASH are fully committed to excellence in health care.

"The hospital has a strong and continuing focus on safety, quality and performance, and this has been confirmed by the latest audit process.

Assessors say passion of staff added to ASH's top-level accreditation
presented the night’s highest honour, ‘the legend award’ as well as taking out the urban category.

Raelene Mungatopi was recognised in the remote health category, Debbie Smith won the specialised category and Letisha Jackson was named best new practitioner.

Tooth brushing program leads to smiles all round

Students at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School showing their brushing technique

A school tooth brushing program at a Tiwi Islands school is building good oral health practices Health Promotions Officer Andrew Packer hopes will last a lifetime.

At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, Meredith Quali’s year two class has a daily tooth brushing routine that has resulted in less children experiencing mouth infections and a better understanding in healthy eating and oral hygiene.

“I noticed some kids were reluctant to smile, and often complained of tooth aches because of decay. Some would comment that my teeth were clean and that I had nice smelling breath,” she said.

“Now they all give me big grins, and love looking at their teeth in the mirror after we brush. They even watch each others’ brushing technique to make sure they’re doing it right.”

The school engaged the help of Mr Packer, to establish the school-wide tooth brushing program.

“Having Andrew involved has been great because he’s been able to teach the children proper tooth brushing techniques and get them excited about healthy eating,” Mrs Quali said.

Mr Packer visits the school twice a year and calls staff monthly to check on the program.

“It doesn’t take a lot of effort but it has great results. The children can see the difference healthy eating and tooth brushing makes and we’ve made them feel good about doing it,” he said.

Mr Packer says part of the program’s goal is to see awareness of oral health spread through the community.

The Minister said the community expects a high standard of public health care and everyone can be proud of the way their hospital is meeting this expectation.

“I would like to commend everyone involved in this achievement – including local community members – for their contribution during the assessment and evaluation process,” he said.

“The assessors made a specific reference to the cleanliness of the hospital and the passion of the staff, which is a tribute to everyone involved.

“All hospital staff have a strong commitment to quality improvement initiatives, and this has been recognised through this latest round of accreditation.”

Health Minister's "Merry Christmas"

I’d like to wish all Territorians a Merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year 2011.

This has been a very big year in the Territory, particularly in the area of Child Protection where we saw the most comprehensive Inquiry ever undertaken into this area.

The Inquiry made broad ranging recommendations and the NT Government is committed to implementing the sweeping reforms required to ensure our child protection system meets the needs of vulnerable children and families.

I would like to thank our tireless and passionate staff working within the child protection system during this challenging time. My special thanks also go to those families who have accepted foster children into their care, and to the many individuals and non government organisations contributing to the safety and wellbeing of children. Helping children to thrive and grow into capable and confident adults is a whole-of-community responsibility, and the Government is truly grateful for your efforts.

I very much look forward to the reshaping of services to include greater Indigenous and NGO input through the creation of Aboriginal child care agencies, the establishment of a peak Aboriginal NGO body and the engagement of the
“Judging by the positive results we’ve had so far, I think this program will filter through the community and create a culture of good oral hygiene in Nguiu,” Mr Packer said.

Territory’s trailblazing eHealth system

Health services from across Australia have met in Katherine to learn about the Northern Territory’s nation-leading electronic health records system.

“The eHealthNT system has been successfully operating for five years and the NT remains the only jurisdiction in Australia with such an advanced model,” Minister for Health Kon Vatskalis said.

Delegates from Queensland, Western Australian and South Australian health services, along with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) took part in the 3-day workshop from 24-26 November.

“The shared electronic records service allows for health information to follow patients as they move between health care providers and improve the quality of care in emergency presentations, as well as reducing duplication of diagnostic tests and improving medication management,” Minister Vatskalis said.

“Information is available where and when it’s needed, overcoming the tyranny of distance in delivering healthcare in remote areas.”

Health Managers Step Out for Graduation Celebration

A total of 21 First Line Managers from across Central Australia have graduated from the Department of Health and Families’ (DHF) Leadership and Management Development Program in Alice Springs.

The locally-developed program is aligned to a nationally-recognised qualification and spans 12 months. It covers the three broad training areas of Managing Yourself, Managing Others and Managing in the Organisation.

When it comes to Health, there have been great gains made in 2010. The Northern Territory’s very first Cancer Care Centre opened earlier this year. This was a very special day for all Territorians as we saw a milestone on cancer treatment reached in the NT.

I recently inspected the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre which has just had its second linear accelerator switched on, and was so very impressed with the level of expertise we have out there. Together, with the excellent support provided at Barbara James House for people from outside Darwin receiving radiotherapy – Territorians can certainly be assured of receiving the best possible care.

The Palmerston Super Clinic commenced daytime GP services, operated by an alliance of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University. This provides a perfect complement to the Urgent Care After Hours Service for the people of the Palmerston region and a perfect training ground for our ‘home-grown’ health professionals as more services commence in 2011.

The New Year promises many more major health milestones with the commencement of the Territory’s first full Medical School; a new aero-medical contract; rollout of the national health reform agenda and improvements to our hospitals; to name just a few.

There’s no doubt, 2010 was a productive year and 2011 is shaping up to be an invigorating year with the new Department of Children and Families and the Department of Health. I wish to thank the whole community for its continued support of our public health care system. The feedback received by my office, and the Department, shows that our doctors, nurses, allied health workers, support staff and child protection workers are held in high regard. This comes as no surprise, for I know what a great job the team does, and I greatly appreciate their dedication.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a healthy and happy New Year. I look forward to catching up with you in 2011.

Best regards –

Kon Vatskalis