
Editorial

Congratulations to the Journal of Military and Veteran Health reaching its 30 year milestone. In this auspicious year, the Royal Australian Air Force celebrates its 100th birthday and it is my pleasure to pen a short editorial for your next edition.

In the year of the centenary of the Royal Australian Air Force we celebrate a rich history of the many different occupations that have come together over this time in service to deliver air and space power to our nation. The contribution of health personnel is a case in point. As recounted in Air Commodore (Retd) Storey's guest editorial in this journal in July, the association of medicine and military aviation is a long one.

As an aviator, I have been a recipient of Air Force health care over the course of my forty year career, on many bases, exercises and operations. Today's Air Force health service is not the same as the one I first encountered all those years ago. It continues to evolve to meet the needs of our Service, the Joint Force and our nation.

While our health service evolves, our people continue to provide high-quality health care to those in need. They have done so for 100 years and will be needed as we face the next century of Air Force. The Air Force health service is relatively small yet the expectations are high for what it can deliver on our bases, in the air and in times of disaster, both in Australia and abroad. To achieve these expectations, the health workforce is a mix of permanent and part time personnel across many professions from medical technicians and nurses to pharmacists and surgeons. The bulk of the workforce belongs in the permanent force with part time personnel providing different levels of service to meet operational requirements with some of these part time positions at the same readiness notice as our contingent workforce. Through this partnership, highly skilled clinicians can serve their nation in a capacity that is best suited to them while meeting the capability requirements of Air Force.

Direct support of aviation occurs on our bases every day. Aviation Medical Officer's support to operational squadrons and Aerodrome Emergency Health Response are but part of the effort. The Institute of Aviation Medicine is a world class, respected specialist unit that has recently evolved to

provide Senior Aviation Medical Officers on our main bases for direct clinical support, aircrew training and education and mentoring of junior medical officers. Aviation medicine is integral to the human performance and safety aspects of military aviation and the Institute leads that effort.

The reputation of our health services remains strong with our partners in the region. The Indo-Pacific has seen the ADF support peace-keeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster response emergencies as well as enduring and opportunistic training exercises and joint activities. Our health services have contributed equally, relative to our size, to many activities and events in the Indo-Pacific, from Timor Leste and Banda Aceh (Boxing Day Tsunami) to the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Bali and Bougainville. With compassion, skill and courage our Air Force health services, in partnership with other Air Force capabilities face adversity, delivering what is needed in environments that can challenge our steadfastness. Facing that adversity as part of the Joint Force, collaborating within our region and our coalition partners, we know that to be truly effective, we must work together to maximise our effects.

Our health services contribution to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is the longest example of working with our coalition partners. Our goal to achieve the best possible health outcomes for all coalition forces and, at times, civilians, in the area of operations was challenging. While the recent events in Afghanistan may cause us to reflect, we can be proud of our achievements and the difference we made to the lives of many Afghans.

We continue to demonstrate considerable agility. From December 2019 through 2020 to now domestic support to Operation Bushfire Assist and COVID Assist 19 has been a constant with many tasks in support of the Australian community. These include the short notice assistance to Victorian nursing homes and to the Burnie Base Hospital. Concurrently the aeromedical evacuation support to White Island volcano evacuations, the recent Afghanistan evacuation operation, the maintenance of a constant aeromedical evacuation pathway between the Middle East and Australia and Aviation Medical Officer support to deployed squadrons has kept the health services busy.

The health, including mental health of our people is most important. As we begin to think about life after service, we need to be assured that support services are available and in place as we transition. I continue to work closely with the Chief of Defence Force and other Service Chiefs to ensure our people are well supported and given the opportunity to succeed during their transition to civilian life. We have an obligation. We must not fail.

Mel Hupfeld, AO, DSC
Air Marshal
Chief of Air Force