

Practice accreditation in Walgett, and NSW's best chicken burger

Submitted By: **Kylie Robb, Practice Support and Oral Health Coordinator**



In April of this year, in my capacity as ADA NSW's Practice Support and Oral Health Coordinator, I travelled to Walgett to meet Dr Sandra Meihubers, Dental Consultant, and the dental team at Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service's (WAMS's) dental facility.

The WAMS team successfully achieved accreditation in accordance with the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards in August 2014. Proud of their achievements, they invited me to visit WAMS's state-of-the-art dental facility. During my time there, I also got a taste of the warm hospitality that Walgett, the gateway to Outback NSW's opal fields, has to offer.

Walgett is a nine-hour drive north west of Sydney, or a quick commuter flight to Dubbo followed by a 60-minute charter connection in a small plane. Either way, it is easy to see that Walgett really is 'outback', so I was curious to see how things worked at a practice in a remote town.

WAMS's dental facility has two treatment rooms, modern digital imaging equipment and OASIS practice management software. WAMS's goal is to improve the health and wellbeing of

individuals and the community, and treats all members of the community, 40% of WAMS whom are non-Aboriginal.

Established in 1986, WAMS is a non-profit organisation relying on support from individuals and community groups as well as corporations, trusts, foundations and government agencies.

Dr Sandra Meihubers graduated from the University of Sydney and worked as a dentist in Australia's first Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern in the 1980s. Sandra then worked with Nganampa Health Council in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands in South Australia. Building on networks established across Australia, she now works with Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation in Broken Hill as well as with WAMS, Nganampa and other remote services in the Northern Territory. Sandra has been working with WAMS since 2000.

Sandra recruits locum dentists to work in Maari Ma and WAMS. 'A lot of the dentists will work at the clinic for a couple of weeks or more at a time, and then return annually for many years after their first visit,' said Sandra. WAMS is about to employ a permanent dentist in July.



Dr Sandra Meihubers (left) and ADA NSW's Kylie Robb (Right).

Since WAMS and Maari Ma have achieved accreditation, the visiting dentists and local teams understand that their infection control practices, and patient safety and quality systems, operate under a nationally benchmarked set of health standards. Visiting dentists enjoy their time working efficiently and effectively in an accredited practice.

Sandra is proud that WAMS and Maari Ma are pioneers in accreditation of Aboriginal dental health services in NSW. 'I think accreditation is important, and even though Walgett and Broken Hill are way out there, we are still aware of what it takes to ensure national health standards that patients expect are met.'

Over lunch, Sandra discussed ways of improving oral health that build on local resources. 'If we are not always able to influence people on oral hygiene or diet, what else can we do in the background?'

Sandra then told me about the Water for Walgett Kids project she was launching at Walgett Community College with the support of WAMS, the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal, Health Habitat and the Rotary Club of Dee Why-Warringah. Through the project, a water chiller has been installed to encourage the students to drink water which has been recently fluoridated.

WAMS have also given the students water bottles to further encourage them to drink water rather than soft drinks.

Sandra posited that: 'With the addition of fluoride into Walgett's water supply, we need to find ways to get children to drink the water so they will further benefit from the protection fluoride gives to fight dental decay'.

Sandra and the team at WAMS are dedicated to serving their local community. They have been working together for a long time and see each other more as extended family than colleagues. Achieving accreditation has strengthened this bond. Together, they achieved an important goal for their dental practice and their patients by ensuring their standards of care are benchmarked against national health care standards.

If you are interested in Introductory Dental Practice Accreditation or you would like some guidance or support to achieve accreditation, please contact your ADA (NSW Branch) **Practice Support and Oral Health Coordinator, Kylie Robb on (02) 8436 9927** or email accreditation@adansw.com.au

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CAFE 64

I enjoyed lunch with Sandra and Lynne Turner, the dental therapist, at Walgett's famous Cafe 64 which is renowned for having the best baked goods and coffee for well over 160 kilometres. This cafe also provides meaningful employment to its 14 employees who have a disability, with over 70% being indigenous. I experienced the best chicken burger of my life here, and enjoyed the local artwork that was on display in the attached Don Lillyman Indigenous Art Gallery.

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