

40 STORIES IN 40 YEARS

Associate Professor Brian Le



As the Director of Palliative Care at The Royal Melbourne Hospital and Peter McCallum Cancer Centre, Brian Le is very passionate about supporting people on their end-of-life journey.

Brian has been the director of the shared palliative care service across Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and The Royal Melbourne Hospital for the past five years, and director and The Royal Melbourne Hospital ten years prior to that. His background is as a palliative care doctor and in medical oncology.

“What drew me to palliative care is the holistic and person focussed care and knowing we can really make a difference to the patient in what is often one of the most challenging times in their life.”

“Sometimes it is the small things that make a difference. Just being able to listen to people’s stories, or being able to tweak a couple of things to address their symptoms, and really understanding where the patient and their family is at, these are things that can really help.”

“There certainly are situations that are very challenging about working in palliative care, but all in all, it is incredibly rewarding.”

“I’ve worked with and looked after lots of memorable people across my time, but one moment that stands out is a PCV launch that we did at Very Special Kids in Malvern. There were a number of government representatives there, including the Premier. It was one of the first times I felt that we were tracking well with government and things were changing for the better in our sector.”

“The other thing that is really memorable for me is the growth in our research capabilities. We’ve had success with a few grants, and we’re seeing more focus on research in the sector and how we can continue its growth.”

As well as working at The Royal Melbourne and Peter MacCallum, Brian has been involved in a number of other organisations concerning palliative care, including as chairman for Palliative Care Victoria.

“I joined the Palliative Care Victoria board and was the chair for a short time. It was during a really exciting time for PCV and I had the great pleasure of working with two CEO’s while there – Kevin Larkins and Odette Waanders. We achieved some great things at the time, not only for Palliative Care Victoria but the sector more widely.”

Brian explains that while he has seen significant growth in the sector across his time, there are a number of things that have continued to stay the same, including the focus on good patient care.

“I work predominately in a hospital-based service in Melbourne, and occasionally in the regions. Across the years I’ve seen substantial development in all aspects of palliative care and its delivery.”

“In my own service, we went from no palliative care units to two palliative care units. We also have outreach services, hospital consultation services, outpatient clinics, the state-wide Palliative Care Advice Service and research programs in association with the University of Melbourne, just to name a few.

“However, no matter how much we grow, we have always retained a focus on the patient, and we do our best to look after that patient, whatever their needs are at the time.”

Brian does also acknowledge the need for the sector to embrace change so that it can continue to flourish.

“In palliative care we often do things, not because we necessarily know it is the right thing to do, but because we have always done it that way. So, we need people to come in and challenge us on why we do it so we can work out the best approach to palliative care into the future.”

“The people we are looking after are different from when we first started palliative care in Victoria, so we need to continue adapting. As a sector, we can be a bit set in our ways so we do need to embrace change.”

“Going forward we have to remember that palliative care is about treating the person, and we need to continue doing this to the best of our ability, even if the way we do that needs to change.”