

Good health for young Israelis

Israeli paediatrics has undergone a revolution inspired by Australian medical practice. **Peter Kohn** takes a closer look.



Professor Frank Oberklaid

ISRAELI paediatrician Dr Einat Martonovich-Lantsberg's work with children has come a long way since her 18 months at a clinic in a low-income area of South Tel Aviv. Her training has been revolutionised by a change of culture driven from, of all places, faraway Australia.

For issues such as soiling and ADHD, she is now able to offer timely treatments to children, rather than red-tape referrals with frustrating waits.

Volunteering for training in Australia at the emergency department of the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) in Melbourne, she would later join Goshen, an Israeli program based on an Australian model that has given Israeli paediatrics a new lease on life.

The training has enabled grass-roots paediatrics to become a feature of Israeli medicine. At a forum of paediatricians, Martonovich-Lantsberg recently explained the benefits she has gained. Even though she had worked at the Schneider Medical Centre in Petah Tikvah, one of the largest hospitals in

Israel, she previously did not have the training to handle encopresis (infant soiling) cases.

And much of her clinical caseload would be referred to specialists. Under the Goshen model, things have changed.

"I could treat in a minute, I could give them medication, tell them what to do, give them the right follow-up, instead of them waiting three months," she said.

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Professor Frank Oberklaid
Paediatrics expert

The seeds of Goshen were planted in 2009 when Hadassah Australia president Ron Finkel and acclaimed RCH paediatrician Professor Frank Oberklaid, foundation director of the hospital's Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), were in Israel. Oberklaid had been invited by



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Hadassah to lecture on his Australian work, a revolutionary paediatric healthcare model he had pioneered years earlier. He included an overview of his CCCH model's impact on government policy and the delivery of child health services in the community.

In the audience was Professor David Bransky, chair of the Department of Paediatrics at Hadassah Hospital, who was overwhelmed by Oberklaid's presentation. He told Oberklaid that what the CCCH was doing was desperately needed in Israel. The Israeli model had been to give patients five minutes of consultation narrowly focused on disease. It was how paediatricians had been trained and it had never been challenged.

Bransky, Finkel and Oberklaid met with Professor Dan Engelhard, head of the Department of Paediatrics at Hadassah Ein Kerem. The Melbourne paediatrician explained to his Israeli counterparts that medical and paramedical professionals in Australia no longer focus on organic disease, but on children who present with developmental, behavioural and psychosocial disorders.

Oberklaid said his paediatrics model appeared very novel to Israelis. "Crying babies, children with sleep problems, developmental delay, language disorders, children who soil, behaviour problems, bedwetting ... They're very common. They affect 20-30 per cent of all Australian children, they're seven of the top 10 diagnoses that Australian paediatricians see, and in fact you can't become a paediatrician in Australia unless you're trained in this area."

He noted that over his long career, the treatment of children's cancer and serious disease has been transformed, as has genomics, the diagnosis of rare diseases in children. "Genomics now not only helps diagnose the genetic cause of that disease, but offers an intervention as well."

And children's medical problems have changed, he said. "We no longer see infectious disease, we no longer see children with the sort of conditions we used to see when I was starting off my career. We now see children with what one of my old mentors termed the 'new morbidity'. What comes to paediatricians in Australia now are children that don't have organic disease but have developmental and behavioural and psychosocial issues."

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In 2009, the Australian idea took hold and Goshen was formalised shortly after. It was agreed that Israeli paediatrician Dr Hava Gadassi would study with Oberklaid at the CCCH in Melbourne. Finkel committed to fundraising and a fellowship was founded to enable Gadassi's Melbourne studies.

The following year, Finkel and Oberklaid convened a dinner at the Goshen, a popular Tel Aviv restaurant, which brought together interested paediatricians, government representatives, the chair of the Israeli Paediatric Association, and others, to discuss the possibility of establishing a CCCH-style centre in Israel.

Finkel recalled, "I was so impressed with the enthusiasm and passion of the participants, and their strong support for such a venture, that I committed to finding the funds to get this started. The name of the restaurant became the name of our project."

Gadassi was in Melbourne for two-

and-a-half years, training as the CCCH Community Paediatrics Fellow and clinician. During that time, she absorbed the RCH's innovative model of paediatric care. Returning to Hadassah, she began to work with others in establishing the Goshen centre. Since then, three other paediatricians have been trained in Melbourne, and a developmental psychologist and other professionals have spent sabbaticals at CCCH.

Goshen continued to operate within

since 2015. Each year, it runs a training program for Israeli paediatricians. From a modest start of 30 in the first intake, Goshen is training 150 paediatricians in 2020-21.

"Now, some 10 years later, Goshen is a prominent national organisation which is having a transformative effect on child health in Israel," said Finkel, noting there are around 3000 paediatricians working independently in Israel, of which close to half have been exposed to Goshen.

It has established a parenting and professional website in Hebrew and Arabic, with parenting content adapted from the very successful Raising Children website in Australia.

"It has trained scores of paediatricians, has grants from philanthropists and philanthropic organisations in Israel, Australia and America, and has been contracted by Israel's Ministry of Health to play a key role to transform the delivery of maternal and child health services across the country."

Finkel said NCCCH launched clinical services for common childhood developmental and behavioural problems. It is also an academic centre for training paediatricians and conducting research.

The training of medical specialists and the delivery of clinical services extends to the Palestinian communities. The NCCCH also plans to raise awareness among families and professionals who work with children about the importance of early identification and treatment of developmental and behavioural problems. Importantly NCCCH is branching out to other parts of Israel and becoming a core part of community clinics.

Summing it up, Finkel noted, "Goshen offers Australian Jewry an ongoing and deeply meaningful way of contributing to the development of Israeli civil society."

Dr Einat Martonovich-Lantsberg
Israeli paediatrician

the Hadassah framework until 2014 when it became an independent not-for-profit organisation, with Israel's Professor Eitan Kerem as its chair.

Oberklaid's reputation in Australia gave the original syndicate of five communal foundations the confidence to provide seed funding for Goshen. Other major Australian donors played a critical role through AUSIMED, an Australia-Israel Research Initiative established in 2012 to foster medical research collaboration between Australia and Israel.

Now on Goshen's board, Finkel said funding was secured from a major donor in New York and supported by the Sam and Minnie Smorgon Family Foundation in Melbourne. The Israeli centre, modelled on its RCH counterpart, was launched as the National Centre for Community Child Health (NCCCH).

Goshen has been expanding its programs

Helping Israeli mums and kids

TWO years ago, Goshen was commissioned by the Israeli government to work with Tipat Halav, Israel's mother-and-child health centre network. According to Dr Maya Yaari, Goshen's director of research and evaluation, it allowed Goshen to leverage an existing national infrastructure to effectively revolutionise child health care in Israel.

Tipat Halav's traditional emphasis on health experts has morphed into a partnership-based model, with parents listened to and respected. Tipat Halav has

come into its own during COVID-19, which generally does not affect children directly but can cause problems with child health care. Local Tipat Halav nurses are now reaching out to young mothers through Zoom, guiding and supporting them through COVID-related issues impacting on kids.

Goshen board member Darren Rockman, a former Melburnian who made aliyah 26 years ago, noted, "I see there are three pillars to what Goshen is doing ... to educate, to reform and to restructure."

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