

## **Latex safe healthcare in South Australia**

*Pooja Newman, Founder & Director of globalaai*

It is with very great excitement and fulfilment, that we can announce today the first Globalaai approved latex-safe hospital in Australia. Latex-safe healthcare is not a new phenomena – Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore has been latex-safe since 2008. There are many latex-safe hospitals across the United States, unfortunately Australia has been slower to implement these important changes.

Latex allergy is a common condition, especially amongst healthcare workers. Up to 20% of healthcare workers suffer with latex allergy and in the United States it affects over 3 million. There are massive costs associated with latex allergy, including diagnosis and treatment, Workers Compensation payments and theatre inefficiencies.

The primary cause of latex allergy is repeated exposure to natural rubber latex (NRL) and the main aim of treatment is avoidance of exposure to NRL. Creating latex-safe environments, whether that be in hospitals, hairdressers, or food handling locations, both prevents latex allergy from developing in non-allergic individuals and avoids latex-sensitive individuals from suffering allergic reactions.

Latex-safe means creating an environment has removed all latex containing gloves, both examination and sterile, but has also gone further and removed latex from other products. To be classified as a latex-safe environment, the facility needs to have identified all possible sources of NRL, removed all products containing NRL and identify, register and continually look for alternatives for any NRL containing products where there is currently no suitable NRL-free alternative.

While there has been a general shift away from latex containing products in healthcare over recent years, we are unaware of any latex-safe hospitals in Australia – until now. We are very pleased that a private facility such as Northern Endoscopy Centre has seen the benefit of removing latex containing products from their hospital.

Globalaai has been in discussions with the Health Minister, the Honorable Jack Snelling, about making South Australia leaders in latex-safe health care – in particular making the new Royal Adelaide Hospital, a latex-safe hospital. Northern Endoscopy Centre has shown that it is possible, that it is cost-effective and that it will make healthcare safer for its patients and employees. Unfortunately, the Minister and SA Health has not seen this as an opportunity to both protect its employees from developing latex allergy and also protecting latex-allergic patients from further exposure to latex.

I, as a frequent patient in the current Royal Adelaide Hospital, have been repeatedly exposed to latex containing products, despite it being clear that I have a latex allergy. Such exposures have lead to more suffering, prolonged hospital admissions and great cost to the taxpayer. When there are appropriately suitable alternatives to latex containing products, there is not reasonable or sensible explanation to why the latex containing product should be stocked.

It is my absolute pleasure to introduce to you, Mr Andrew Taylor, General Manager of Northern Endoscopy Centre and Southern Endoscopy Centre, to share with you his journey to achieving latex-safe facilities.

## **Our journey towards becoming a latex safe**

*Andrew Taylor, General Manager of Northern Endoscopy Centre and Southern Endoscopy Centre*

The Northern Endoscopy Centre (NEC) was established in the mid 80's to provide specialist gastroenterological day procedures including upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and colonoscopy, to support patients and local practitioners within the northern suburbs of Adelaide, whilst more recently our new Southern Endoscopy Centre (SEC) opened in 2016 to service the southern region and bay area of Adelaide.

Dr Matthew Newman is one of the many Specialist Anaesthetists that operates at both our hospital sites and has a special interest in anaesthesia related anaphylaxis. Following the near death experience of his wife Pooja at the Adelaide Adele concert, we discussed the emergence of Globalaai and the importance of being latex aware and safe within a healthcare environment.

Like all healthcare providers, we have historically observed that latex allergies have certainly become more prevalent with surgical glove powder initially identified many years ago as a major contributor. Over the years, improved powder-free, lower-protein natural rubber latex gloves and non-latex glove alternatives have emerged within the healthcare environment. Not unlike many other healthcare facilities, NEC has historically employed a mix of both natural rubber latex (NRL) and non-latex nitrile rubber gloves.

Following the recent discussions with Dr Newman and whilst performing of our regular risk audits, we investigated several ways we could reduce both procedural complexity and overall risk regarding patients with known latex allergies.

It was determined that rather than moving any latex adverse patients to the beginning of our clinical lists each day to avoid latex cross contamination, the most effective and simple approach would be to completely remove latex gloves and any other obvious latex products from within the hospital environment. After reviewing previously documented studies, we noted that some hospitals had experienced some initial resistance to changing completely to non-latex gloves, mostly due to the perceived cost increase to a non-latex conversion and the perception that non-latex gloves were not as comfortable or do not provide as good a barrier as NRL gloves.

Once it was illustrated that non-latex nitrile rubber gloves were actually more cost effective for our hospital group and supported the best practice modelling regarding clinical simplification and risk aversion, we removed all NRL gloves for a period of three months to gauge whether there were any issues – there was none! All clinicians and staff experienced no discernible difference in the performance of their regular duties.

As latex is also a component within a large number of medical devices, we commenced recording items with NRL components in order to seek possible alternatives to further minimise risk within our hospital environment. Supporting policies and procedures were then developed regarding the recording, auditing and reporting on any latex products to support a latex safe environment.

Both the Northern Endoscopy and Southern Endoscopy Centres are extremely pleased to be supporting Globalaai with their promotion of awareness and safety for sufferers of allergic disease including latex anaphylaxis.