

11 March 2020

## Transforming the hospital experience with a friendly robot

Patients and visitors at Fairfield Hospital have been surprised and delighted to receive a warm welcome from a friendly robot.

The Pepper humanoid robot greets visitors and patients and helps them find their way around the hospital as part of a collaborative research project between South Western Sydney Local Health District's Clinical Innovation and Business Unit and the University of Technology Sydney.

Fairfield Hospital General Manager Paul Crowe said the hospital was chosen to trial the social robot technology because it serves one of Australia's most culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

"The robot is extra-special because it converses in five prevalent languages in south western Sydney– English, Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese and Italian," Mr Crowe said.

"Our patients and visitors have been amazed to see a robot in our foyer. It's been a real success – the robot is happy and friendly and everyone loves it."

The robot interacts and collaborates with humans using artificial intelligence technology in a natural and socially intuitive way to help people find their way in a hospital.

The research project is one of the first in Australia to analyse the effectiveness of a social robot in a hospital wayfinding capacity. The robot listens to and speaks to people looking for directions in one-on-one engagement.

Distinguished Professor Mary-Anne Williams, Director of the UTS Magic Lab, Australia's leading social robotics centre, said people-friendly robots can help transform the hospital experience for patients, visitors and health professionals.

"Hospitals are complex buildings so by greeting people and helping them find locations more easily, they are more likely to make appointments on time, and help staff maintain schedules," Professor Williams said.

"Social robots can navigate, fetch and carry, and help people find and connect with each other. They are multilingual and able to understand more than 100 languages.

"People enjoy interacting with social robots because they can read human emotions, don't make judgements and have unlimited patience."

Pepper will be participating in the public trial at Fairfield Hospital until 13 March 2020.

The 2019-20 budget for SWSLHD is almost \$2 billion, an increase of nearly \$94 million on the previous financial year's budget.