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Showcase explores the latest COVID-19 research

South Western Sydney Local Health District is leading two pioneering COVID-19 research projects to improve care to patients through the pandemic.

The projects are featured in the virtual COVID-19 Special Edition of the Health Beyond Research & Innovation Showcase, which community members can enjoy online and from the comfort of their homes.

The first of the projects is an Australian-first study that allows a doctor in a major teaching hospital to care for critically ill patients in Intensive Care Units in rural hospitals kilometres away.

South Western Sydney Local Health District Clinical Director of Critical Care Associate Professor Deepak Bhonagiri has implemented this virtual model for more than 200 critically ill ICU patients across Bowral & District and Goulburn Hospitals, with Campbelltown Hospital as its host.

“This model of care has not been used in an ICU setting before. It’s important research during the COVID-19 pandemic because it avoids the risk of transmission which can happen when patients are transported between hospitals for their care,” Associate Professor Bhonagiri said.

“It means patients in regional and remote areas have access to the same high-level of care as provided in the major teaching hospital without having to travel this long distance. They can stay in their local area and near their families and this is important for their wellbeing and recovery.

“This virtual model of care may be used to support the management of COVID-19 patients in the future and has the potential to shape new models of ICU care.”

The second initiative is a world-first in tracking child development with an online program that means any concerns can immediately be addressed, and families can connect to early intervention programs.

Professor Valsamma Eapen, who heads the District’s BestSTART-SW Academic Unit, says the two-year trial of the *Watch Me Grow* platform is a game-changer for families taking part, and will ensure children’s development needs are supported, especially through the pandemic

“The aim is to identify a child’s needs early, before they start preschool or school, so that they can receive the interventions early before the problems get worse. Parents can use the online platform in GP waiting rooms, play groups, childcare settings and at home to complete a questionnaire that will help monitor their child’s development.”

The trial will include 150 families from multicultural backgrounds in Fairfield and 150 families living in rural locations in the Murrumbidgee area in southern NSW.

Both initiatives have been awarded a NSW Health COVID-19 research grant worth a combined total of almost \$1 million to fund their research.

A total of eight leading researchers from the District and the Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research are presenting their work in the online showcase seminar.

To watch the showcase or tune in to a previous seminar, visit www.healthbeyondshowcase.org.au