

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

From: Kasey McCulloch, Media Officer, Mercy Health

Event details: Mercy Health Gala Ball – Celebrating the Joy of Children
Saturday 4 June, 7.00pm
Sofitel Melbourne On Collins, 25 Collins Street, Melbourne

Mercy Health Foundation Gala Ball to benefit sick mothers and babies

The Mercy Health Foundation will host its annual Gala Ball on Saturday 4 June at Sofitel Melbourne On Collins to raise money and awareness for Mercy Perinatal.

The theme for this year's event is 'Celebrating the Joy of Children' and continues Mercy Health's mission to fund research and care of the most vulnerable and complicated pregnancies: those where there is a major risk of death or disability for either a mother or her unborn baby.

Mercy Perinatal is an exciting new initiative which aims to be a centre of perinatal excellence - advancing research, teaching and clinical practice with a focus on the first nine months of life.

The program is being driven by Mercy Health Director of Perinatal Medicine Professor Sue Walker and Head of Translational Obstetrics Professor Stephen Tong.

"Our research focus is on improving the health of mothers and babies now, and in the future – investing in their sisters, and their daughters," explained Prof Tong.

"For example, this year we have commenced a clinical trial in South Africa using a simple medication to treat preeclampsia, a condition that claims the lives of 70,000 mothers and 500,000 babies worldwide every year. Incredibly, a quarter of patients needed for the trial have already been recruited, and we expect an outcome by the end of 2017."

The ability to secure independent funding for Mercy Perinatal will allow other 'fast tracking' of ground-breaking scientific discoveries into clinical trials, and from there into transforming patient care.

The Mercy Health Foundation Gala Ball raised \$160,000 for the program last year through ticket sales and a silent auction, and organisers are hoping to exceed that amount this year.

"Mercy Perinatal is a cause close to many people's hearts and we are very excited to be supporting it again with our major fundraiser for the year," said Mercy Health Foundation General Manager Simon White.

The number of children tragically lost at birth each year is double that of the national road toll. Preterm birth is the number one killer of children under the age of 5 globally and is responsible for nearly one million deaths annually.

Melbourne mother of three Alexandra Tighe knows first-hand the incredible work of Professor Walker and Professor Tong after losing her son John (Jack) in 2012 when he was born prematurely and died at birth.

“After suffering multiple miscarriages following the loss of Jack, I was fortunate enough to connect with Professor Walker,” said Alexandra.

“Professor Walker didn’t leave any stone unturned and as a result of her clinical and emotional support my husband and I welcomed a beautiful baby girl in December 2015.”

“We couldn’t be more appreciative of Professor Walker and Professor Tong and are excited to see how many other families like ours Mercy Perinatal can help.”

– Ends –

For interviews and photo opportunities, please contact:

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