

Hippocrates came across our desks

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TO THE EDITOR: Your column in the 5 September issue of the Journal¹ was exquisitely timely. Four days later, a seedling from the original Hippocratic tree from the island of Cos was planted in the grounds of a clinical school of the Medical Faculty of the University of Sydney (Figure) — not in proximity to the jacarandas of Camperdown, but rather to the river red gums near the School of Rural Health in Dubbo! The School of Rural Health is the newest of Sydney University's clinical schools, having been funded as part of the Regional Health Strategy in 2000.

The story of how the Hippocratic seedling came to Dubbo is wonderful. About 18 months ago, two of us (BH and DJT) were discussing what shade trees should be planted around the new clinical school (summer in Dubbo is hot), and the matter of the Hippocratic tree arose. We discovered that it was a European plane tree and made an initial approach to the National

Library of Medicine in the United States (who, as stated in your column, had grown a tree from a cutting of the original), but this was unsuccessful. However, Dr John Boulas, a Greek-born Sydney-based urologist colleague was soon to depart for the Olympics in Greece and, as luck would have it, undertook to contact a urologist colleague in Greece who looked after the prostate of the mayor of Cos. This was duly done, and within a couple of months, two

seedlings from the original tree arrived at customs in Sydney and spent 3 months in quarantine at the Royal Botanic Gardens. After that time, having been declared free of disease, one was brought to Dubbo to acclimatise.

The official planting took place on 9 September and was officiated over by John Anderson, previous Deputy Prime Minister, who played a major role in the Australian Government's commitment to fund the Regional Health Strategy in 2000, and the new NSW Minister for Health, John Hatzistergos, whose parents came from the island of Cos! To close the loop, both Mr Anderson and Mr Hatzistergos are University of Sydney alumni.

The university's motto ("sidere mens eadem mutato") means "same learning under different stars", indicating its links to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Perhaps the School of Rural Health motto should be "same learning under the same tree"!

In any situation, the links to the history of medicine are firmly established, and medical students will have the opportunity to reflect on the tradition of medicine before their taking of the Hippocratic Oath or its modern equivalent.

Wanted: a few more modern-day Hippocrates to teach under the tree. Apply within.

1 Van Der Weyden MB. The tree of Hippocrates [From the Editor's Desk]. *Med J Aust* 2005; 183: 225. □

