

PRESS RELEASE

Brett Foley

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Infant MRI scans to aid new research

Lisa Gorey's parents were not sure if she would pull through when she was delivered 12 weeks premature at the Royal Women's Hospital 23 years ago.

The survival rate for babies under one kilogram in 1977 was about 25 per cent and only seven babies born that year at the hospital survived.

"I was pretty lucky," said Ms Gorey yesterday, "...mum and dad had a fairly rough time for a while when they didn't know if I was going to survive or not."

Since her birth Ms Gorey has been one of several thousand members of the Premature Infant Follow-Up Program – where staff at the Royal Women's monitor the progress of premature babies.

Lex Doyle head the program, which has been running for 25 years. Associate Professor Doyle said the information compiled on the development of premature babies has led to great leaps in the treatment and care of early arrivals. The survival rate for premature babies in 1997 had leapt to 72 per cent because, he said, doctors had discovered better ways to care for babies before, during and after birth.

Professor Doyle said premature babies can experience growth deficiencies, breathing difficulties due to lack of lung development and brain abnormalities.

The program is to be bolstered by a world-first proposal to conduct MRI scans of premature babies to determine how their brains differ from babies born at full term. Associate Professor Terri Inder said the emphasis was shifting from simply survival, to improving the quality of life for premature children.

