

In support of a labyrinth at the site of the old RCH in Royal Park

I worked at the Royal Children's Hospital between 1982 and 2008, first as a junior resident and latterly as senior consultant paediatrician in pain management. I can only imagine what it would have been like if there had been a labyrinth to walk close by.

My first labyrinth walk was in Vancouver in 2002, on an RCH travelling scholarship, but it was impossible to locate one in Melbourne on my return. Now the numbers are increasing but there are only a few in public places and only one at a Children's hospital in Australia.

I would have walked a labyrinth every day to benefit my own health and wellbeing, taking the time to journey into my being to a place of rest and regeneration, as I walked the path to the centre, then returning refreshed to my work, or home at the end of the day. I would have recommended it to the families I worked with, to help with tension, anxiety and grief, and also for contemplation, celebration and gratitude. It is different from and complementary to a walk in the park, or sitting in the chapel.

Walking a labyrinth can provide a sense of focus and calm, and there are times when its sacred geometry could have helped me before important meetings with staff and patients, or the parents and children before a big procedure.

Having the community facility of a labyrinth would have broken down the sense of us and them. Much as communal eating areas, and now the meerkats at the new hospital, a labyrinth is for everyone, and would have fostered that we are all one, we are all in this together, this is a caring community, where we have time to care for ourselves and each other.

Unlike many facilities, a labyrinth once built does not require ongoing staff and has minimal maintenance costs, depending on structure. In other words it is cost effective, and everyone would have breathed a sigh of relief that there was at least one service at the hospital that did not cost money to run, to use and to maintain! At the same time, it would have been a great focal point for activities including group walks to music, by anyone and everyone in the hospital community and beyond.

I hope my imagined past is the reality of the near future and the Royal Children's Hospital embraces the modern revival of this ancient spiritual tool.

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