

30 minutes
with...

**Dr. Sasha
Dionisio**



What is the exact title of your role?

Hello, I am a consultant epileptologist and head of the Mater Advanced Epilepsy Unit, Queensland's first and only public adult level 4 epilepsy surgery centre. I also work at the Princess Alexandra Neurology Department as an epilepsy specialist.

Where do you currently work & how long have you been working there?

I have been working at both units since 2015, when I returned from my clinical fellowship abroad.

I am sure you have seen a great deal of change in epilepsy treatments. What do you think is the most exciting change & why?

To me, the most exciting change has been to bring the Stereo-EEG (SEEG) methodology to Queensland. Stereo-EEG is one of the most complicated invasive procedures and despite being around for almost 60 years, it is still the least performed and least understood invasive technique in the world. Fortunately, it is rapidly becoming more popular.

SEEG involves the insertion of electrodes into various regions of the brain. It allows patients with focal epilepsy and normal imaging, to have epilepsy surgery done. Not only has it transformed the lives of our patients (most of whom were previously told that they could not have surgery as their brain scan was normal) but it has allowed us to further understand the brain and to be able to train Queensland neurologists in this complex technique.

We are also extremely proud to have the only ROSA robot for epilepsy surgery in the Southern Hemisphere. Dr Papacostas (consultant neurosurgeon, Brisbane Clinical Neuroscience Centre) uses this during the implantation and it has been a game changer.

With the SEEG technique we have been able to utilize very advanced treatments such as deep brain stimulation (DBS) as well as the gamma knife (both with the support of the Princess Alexandra Hospital), to help our patients. In addition, we have established very strong national and international links with the SEEG program. With the consent of our patients, we often collaborate with some of the top epilepsy centres in the world. So our patients ultimately benefit from some of the best epileptologists both from Australia and Internationally. Exciting times for Queensland!

Where else have you worked in your life?

I spent 2 years at the prestigious Cleveland Clinic Foundation Epilepsy Centre (USA) where I was appointed as the chief epilepsy fellow. That was one of the greatest experiences in my life, having the privilege to train and work with 20 of the best epileptologists in the world. I did my general neurology training in Sydney and Brisbane and general medical training and med school in Dublin, Ireland.

What do you love about your job?

Absolutely everything. I always wanted to work in epilepsy and one day make a difference, even before medical school. So this is my dream and my passion. It is a great privilege to be able to help people suffering with epilepsy and seeing the positive changes. I love my entire team- we are close knit bunch and many patients feel it. We work hard, we learn together, we support each other and we never give up. We are always pushing forward with ideas and research and trying to break the boundaries of what we understand about this disease in the hope that ultimately, one day, we will cure epilepsy. It is an honour to work with my team and I am immensely proud of their achievements. This is much more than a "job" or "work" to us.

Where would you most like to travel?

One thing I have always wanted to do is spent time with the Indigenous people of Australia. If they were willing, I would love to learn from their immense knowledge and spiritual links with nature and the earth.

What is your favourite food?

I will give anything a try. I wish I could be more vegetarian though and eat less meat.

Describe your most embarrassing moment?

Drinking from a hand wash bowl during a dinner meeting...there was a slice of lemon in it and I mistook it for tea. Obviously, the lemon wasn't only in the bowl...

What/who is your favourite book/author?

There are too many works of art to name just one. So for now, I am reading Andre Vltchek's "Exposing lies."

Who would you like to meet?

Can I choose 5 people (alive or passed)? David Attenborough, Fidel Castro, Robert Fisk, Mike Tyson, Nikola Tesla, Jean Bancaud...also Russel Brand, Jose Marti, Jeremy Corbyn...wait that's more than 5 now...

What genres of music do you like listening to/favourite song?

My playlist right now for the bus ride is this: Evidence-throw it all away, Midnight express- Danger zone, Pharoahe monch- time 2, Chino XL- fathers day, Brother ali- stop the press, Stevie wonder- As, Marvin Gaye- What's going on, Jackson 5- I wanna be where you are, MJ- Sunset Driver, Dilated Peoples- LA river drive.

Do you have any interesting hobbies you would like to tell us about?

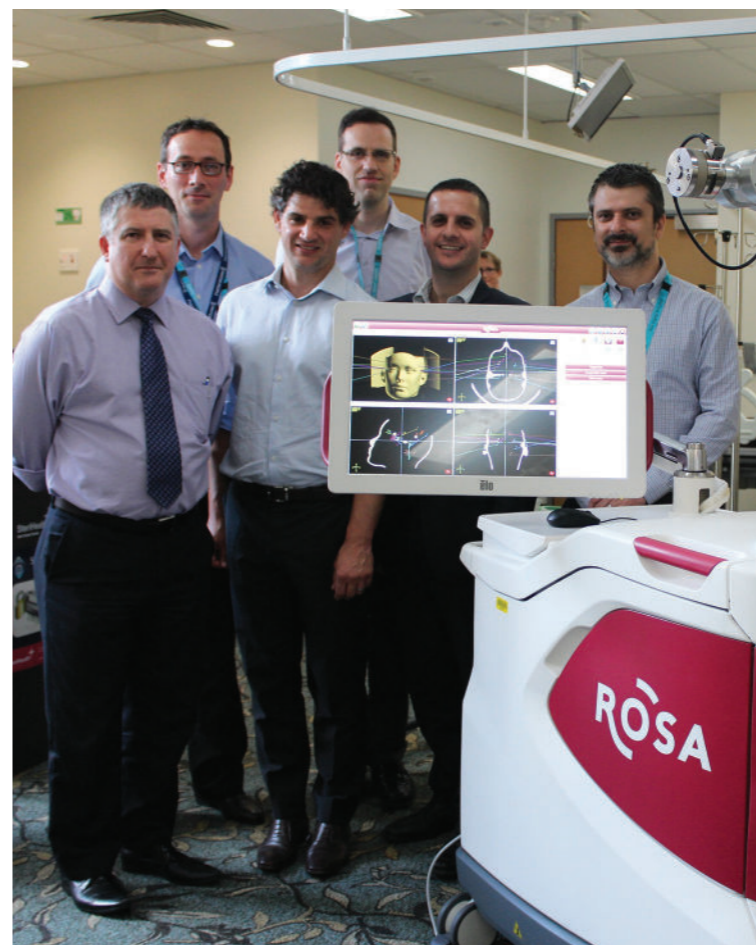
I used to have tons from martial arts, diving, DJing to breakdancing (!) but now my life is more about changing nappies, making food and washing clothes for my little daughter and I would not change this for the world!

What do you feel would greatly improve epilepsy care currently in Queensland?

There needs to be changes on multiple levels. Firstly, the neurology community need to be better at teaching their trainees about epilepsy. We definitely need more epilepsy specialists around both in the adult and pediatric communities and encouraging and inspiring the younger generation of neurologists is imperative.

There needs to be far more recognition and resources invested into epilepsy care from a government level including funding for epilepsy services, local and statewide epilepsy support services and improved social services (Centrelink assistance for example as well as graduated return to work programs). Government programs also need to especially be supportive of the growth of higher end epilepsy units offering complex surgeries and treatments and this is especially critical in the pediatric epilepsy community, where seizure freedom is absolutely transforming.

Most importantly there is the ultimate need to recognize that illness comes in all forms and that the stigmatization and discrimination that people face, has no place in society and benefits no one. We really do need to "bring epilepsy out of the shadows". Thank you for having me.



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