Dr Karen Phillips, HeartCare Partners Cardiologist, GenesisCare
100 Women of Influence Award, Global Category 2015

After returning in 2008 from a period of specialized overseas training at the top-rated cardiac hospital in the USA, The Cleveland Clinic, Dr Karen Phillips has established a Centre of Excellence for the treatment of Atrial Fibrillation at Greenslopes Private Hospital in Brisbane. Atrial fibrillation is a common, chronic heart rhythm condition which causes disabling symptoms and is associated with a high risk of stroke in the aging population. Her single-minded focus on comprehensive treatment of this condition has seen her perform keyhole catheter ablation treatments inside the hearts of hundreds of Australians to remedy the heart rhythm condition, with often dramatic results. In 2009 she was selected to champion a new keyhole procedure to implant a small plug called the ‘Watchman’ inside the heart of patients with atrial fibrillation which prevents the formation of blood clots that lead to stroke. Six years later she has emerged as the lead implanter of this unique medical device in Australia and one of the most experienced in the world. She has lectured on the subject regularly at international medical conferences, published on her clinical research in Cardiology journals and trained numerous other Cardiologists in the safe performance of the procedure both in Australia and across Asia. She has been a passionate advocate for the new treatment which includes an ongoing process of lobbying the Australian Government for regulatory changes which would allow for subsidy and access of the therapy to more Australians. She has pioneered a combined treatment of keyhole catheter ablation with the Watchman plug implant which she says can offer patients both the short term relief of symptoms, but also a lifelong legacy of stroke protection.

Dr Phillips is one of very few female Cardiologists in her field in Australia. She is a role model not only to other women with aspirations in clinical medicine but to all who acknowledge her combination of passion, compassion, skill and leadership.

In March 2015 Dr Phillips was invited to Hangzhou, China to lecture on her experience in the combined catheter ablation and Watchman plug implant procedure. Her schedule included a presentation on the topic to Chinese Cardiologists at a regional Cardiac Conference, supervision and teaching during an implant procedure at Hangzhou City Peoples’ Hospital and published interview with a medical innovation magazine called ‘Clinic’ with a distribution to more than 30,000 Physicians across China. The interview was also published online in April 2015 on WeChat in China with more than 6000 comments on the topic within the first 24 hours of posting. Dr Phillips returned to China in early September 2015 to teach more Chinese Physicians and to lecture at the World Congress of Arrhythmias in Beijing.

With minimal experience in the procedure and therapy to date Chinese Physicians have welcomed Dr Phillips as an expert to teach and shape their understanding. She hopes that her passion and own skill in delivering this medical advance will assist many future patients in China to safely receive vital stroke protection treatment.