

Jackie Gardiner

On Saturday, this neonatal specialist will plunge into the sea at Cottesloe for her first Rottnest Swim, but each stroke will be in memory of a friend who died from cancer.



I'M A PAEDIATRICIAN working in the Newborn Emergency Transport Service of WA attached to the neonatal clinical care units at KEMH and PMH.

I'm swimming to Rottnest in relay with my friend and fellow paediatrician Natalia Vollrath. The idea of the swim came up after I'd just finished a 12-hour shift and Natalia had just come on to start hers. There was no alcohol involved, even though I think a lot of people decide to do the swim after a night at the pub.

Rottnest is 19km from Cottesloe Beach, so it's a long way but we have done a lot of training.

I'm a member of a swimming club and a lot of us are training for the Rottnest swim. It's a very motivational bunch.

I've been swimming since I was five and I love it. When I swim laps, I feel detached and it's then I sort out the world's problems and I feel so much better. I can mull things over.

I need to swim. If I haven't been in the water for three or four days, I get withdrawal symptoms.

My good friend Sarah Mitchell, who died in May 2008 from breast cancer, was the director of the Newborn Emergency Transport Service and a great inspiration in work and in life. She loved to swim.

She swam almost throughout her entire illness. It was her pick-me-up.

When Natalia and I were planning the swim, we decided that we would dedicate it to Sarah's memory and to raise funds for the Solaris Care Foundation, which is a cancer support group that runs drop-in centres for people away from the hospital environment. Sarah was a great supporter of and was greatly supported by Solaris.

The foundation has a link with Aspire Fitness gym in Claremont, which runs special gym sessions for people undergoing cancer treatment.

So far we have raised almost \$5000 and the ultimate aim is to have a room at the gym dedicated to Sarah – The Sarah Mitchell Solaris Suite. She was an incredible woman.

I was born on the west coast of Scotland 35 years ago. I am a twin and we were born 11 weeks premature. If we hadn't been healthy we wouldn't have survived back then. Now it's a very different story with knowledge and technology. But being prem myself, I think, influences what I do now.

My twin, Diane, is an architect in London and she's a runner. She ran the last London marathon and it came into my head that if she can run five hours, I can swim for that long – I guess we're a little

competitive. It also shows that we both must have the long-distance gene but I'm definitely a water girl.

My brother, Colin, is going to be one of our paddlers – you need someone to paddle to keep you going straight. There are no black lines in the ocean. And my uncle has a power boat, so he's our skipper of the support boat.

I've been in Perth since 2003. I started my paediatric training in Sydney and I love working with NETS. We can fly to Kalgoorlie one minute and Esperance the next to pick up sick or prem babies that need special care in Perth.

We are on call from Carnarvon in the north to Esperance in the south.

As of last weekend, I have just been transferred to Derby for a six-month stint, though I've been given special leave to come back to Perth for the Rottnest swim.

There is only a 25m pool in Derby, but it will have to do.

I'm really looking forward to hitting the water about 6.15am on February 20 and I'm sure we will be glad to reach the other side at Rottnest by about 1pm. Sarah's mum, Liz, and her husband, Steve, will be on the beach to greet us and that will make every stroke worthwhile.

Jackie and Natalia's fund-raising site is www.everydayhero.com.au/swimforsarah_9