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father worked on the railways. “Dad was a ganger, he worked on the lines. He only went to Grade 1 or 2 and mum had a Year 7 level education. She was largely self-educated, she worked on farms in the area to earn extra money, picking beans and strawberries,” says Hayman.

Greg McErlain met Hayman 36 years ago through their wives, Sandra and Judy, who played softball together. “Noel was working for Edgells when we first met and then he went back to study medicine and this was while he and Judy had a young family. That was a tough time for them but you never heard either of them complain,” says McErlain.

Its Hayman’s easy-going nature and loyalty that endears him to people. “You cannot walk down the street in the Redlands area without people yelling out to him. Everyone knows him, he’s like a rock star!” laughs McErlain.

In 1994 Hayman established the Inala Indigenous Health Service where he is clinical director. It’s a working model of how mainstream primary health care services can be made appropriate to the needs of urban Aboriginal populations. “You need to treat indigenous patients differently, and that’s what we do, because a lot of my patients really don’t like going to hospitals,” says Hayman. The clinic offers services for eye health, oral health, mental health, alcohol and drug services, diabetes education, breast screening and more, and it does research and training. “We’re like a one-stop shop,” says Hayman.

That “one-stop shop”, as he calls it, is soon to get even bigger as construction of the \$7million Southern Queensland Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Primary Health Care starts this month, which will extend facilities and services to be provided by a team of up to 60 – a far cry from the centre he opened with one nurse 17 years ago. It took Hayman five years of serious lobbying for funding from the government to make his dream come true and his persistence has finally paid off.

“One of the reasons I was very pleased to be recognised as Queensland of the Year is because it means people can see the good work we’re doing at the clinic. When I started, we had 12 patients and now we have over 6000. That’s 1500 consults a month. I am pretty proud of that,” says Hayman.

Dr Geoff Spurling has worked with Hayman at the Inala clinic for eight years. “Sometimes you can hear Noel laughing in a consult from

three rooms away,” says Spurling.

“He’s a fantastic boss. Very compassionate, very motivated, hard-working, non-judgemental, and I’m not sure people outside the medical fraternity realise how much Noel has done to bring Aboriginal health issues to the forefront, locally, federally and even internationally.”

Spurling says Hayman’s enthusiasm is contagious. “I’ve worked in regional Queensland and in Honduras for Médecins Sans Frontières and what he’s doing for his community is inspiring. If you take his work as a whole, his contribution is massive.”

Hayman’s latest project is the Outreach Clinic he set up in Cunnamulla 12 months ago. Once a month he takes specialists, students and a nurse out to treat patients who come from all over the district. “There’s so much work to be done,” he says. “I did have a tribal elder say to me recently, ‘I never thought I’d live to see the day when I’d be seen by an Aboriginal doctor,’ so that was pretty good,” he says with his characteristic modesty.

According to Greg McErlain’s wife, Sandra, Hayman’s skills extend beyond the clinic and sporting arena. “He’s not a bad barbecue cook. But really, Noel excels at everything,” she laughs. “It’s amazing to me that given all he’s done, all he’s achieved, he’s so incredibly modest. He doesn’t talk about his work very much; he wouldn’t bring it up unless you ask him and then he’ll share things. But he’ll tell you about that 30-year-old high jump record! He’s very passionate about the Cunnamulla clinic and what he’s doing at Inala. That and his family, Judy and the kids, they’re his pride and joy.”

Daughter Gemma, 29, a former police officer, is carrying on the family tradition by studying medicine at University of Queensland. Celia, 26, works for Education Queensland and son Sam, 21, works in a law firm. “Oh I couldn’t be more proud of my kids. They’re great people and I am really thrilled Gemma’s studying medicine. I used to take her to lectures with me when she was a little girl, so maybe some of it rubbed off way back then,” laughs Hayman.

As a lover of sports, Hayman cites his role models as Artie Beetson and the Ella brothers. “There weren’t any Aboriginal academic heroes when I was growing up, so part of what we’re trying to do with all of these projects is change that, and from what I see we’re definitely heading in the right direction.”



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