

Rosemary is for remembrance

Once again this year thousands of people gathered in cities and country towns throughout Australia to commemorate Anzac Day. In fact Anzac Day ceremonies were conducted in many other parts of the world, as well.

Anzac Day acknowledges the courage and commitment of our armed forces at Gallipoli 94 years ago; however, 25 April has also become a day to remember that same bravery and dedication to duty displayed by Australian Defence Forces wherever they have been deployed – and of course includes those currently troublesome areas of the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Anzac Day brings with it a mix of emotions – a sense of achievement, a sense of pride, but also a sense of sadness. Nevertheless, for everyone it's a time for reflection – a time to reflect on what is and what might have been.

It's interesting to consider what part flowers and plants play in this process of reflection and remembrance.

For instance, it's now commonplace to wear a sprig of rosemary on Anzac Day. According to the Australian War Memorial website, the use of rosemary as a symbol of remembrance, dates back centuries. Since ancient times this aromatic herb was believed to have properties to improve memory. Possibly because of these supposed properties, rosemary became an emblem of both fidelity and remembrance in ancient literature and folklore.

Rosemary is a small perennial shrub of the mint family. It's a compact evergreen with clusters of small light blue flowers and leaves that produce a fragrant essential oil – an oil that is used in making perfume or as a food flavouring.

Contrary to popular opinion, the name rosemary has nothing to do with the rose or the name Mary, but is derived from the Latin "rosmarinus" which means "dew of the sea". Rosemary is native to the Mediterranean region. And it has a particular significance for Australians, because it's found growing wild on the Gallipoli peninsula.

In addition to the well known culinary uses for rosemary, various medicinal properties are also associated with the herb. It has been recommended for internal use as a treatment for dyspepsia and externally as a mild anti-inflammatory and pain reliever, as supporting therapy for rheumatic conditions. There is little clinical research available assessing its alleged benefits, and no evidence to support the ancient claims for improving memory.

The Flanders Poppy is another flower increasingly being used as part of Anzac Day observances. During the First World War, red poppies were seen to be among the first living plants that sprouted from the devastation of the battlefields of northern France and Belgium.

In the 19th century, in English literature, poppies had symbolised sleep or a state of oblivion. Following the First World War, a new more powerful symbolism was attached to the red poppy – that of the sacrifice of shed blood. The poppy became widely accepted throughout the allied nations as the flower of remembrance to be worn on Armistice Day. An early use of the poppy on Anzac Day was in 1940 in Palestine, where it grows in profusion in spring.

Poppies of a different kind are cultivated for their opium content and it's a grim irony that the Taliban, fighting our forces, are being supported by funds derived from the heroin trade – that's heroin manufactured from the plants in those vast attractive poppy fields of Afghanistan.

The narcotic pain relievers developed from the opium poppy remain one of the most valuable groups of medicines available. Unfortunately the pain experienced by our troops in war zones is often such that it can't be managed by pain relievers alone. Post traumatic stress can be severe and long lasting.

With the assistance of the Australian Government and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Pharmaceutical Society has produced a Fact Card on *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*. It's one of a series of cards that includes *Anxiety*, *Depression* and *Sleeping Problems* available at your nearest Self Care pharmacy. Phone the Pharmaceutical Society on 1300 369 772 for more information or check the Society's website www.psa.org.au and click on "pharmacy finder" for the location of pharmacies providing the Society's Self Care health information.