Robin Warren (left) and his Nobel co-recipient Barry Marshall are known around the world for their discovery of the cause of peptic ulcers. Their controversial research eventually culminated in bold self-experimentation and led to a complete change in the treatment of the condition world-wide. In 2005 they were awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine for their work.

Dr Robin Warren completed his medical degree at the University of Adelaide in 1961 and his Pathology specialisation at Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1967. While working as a Pathologist at Royal Perth Hospital, in 1979 he reported unusual bacterium in biopsies from patients suffering gastritis. This report was greeted with scepticism from the general medical community as stress and lifestyle were widely held to be the cause of the disease. Warren continued his investigations over the next two years, confirming the link. In 1981, he met Professor Barry Marshall, then a gastroenterology registrar at the hospital who was seeking a research project. Together, the pair studied the presence of spiral bacteria in association with gastritis. The following year they performed the initial culture of Helicobacter pylori and developed their hypothesis related to the bacterial cause of peptic ulcer and gastric cancer.

Facing continued scepticism, they sought to establish the link in a clinical setting. In 1984, Professor Marshall demonstrated the bacterial cause of gastritis in a wellpublicised self-administration experiment, in which he drank a culture of H. pylori, and then cured the resulting gastritis with antibiotics and acid inhibitors. Warren and Marshall continued their work with larger clinical trials that demonstrated the startling effectiveness of antibiotic treatment for ulcers. Thanks to their work, peptic ulcer disease is no longer a chronic and frequently disabling condition.