NURSES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In every second issue of the nurses[HUB]news, we feature the views of a nurse working in palliative care or an associated area. Here Kim Devery talks about her interest in Palliative care and CareSearch education.

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How my nursing career informs my current role

I had worked in a wide range of acute settings and specialties before I became interested in palliative care. Also I was very fortunate to work in the United Kingdom, Kenya and United States of America; these experiences of working as a nurse gave me invaluable insights into cultural implications of ill health and wellbeing. The realities of working in different health care systems were also an extremely enlightening experience for me as a nurse early on in my career. This brought home, in stark reality, the idea that our culture and our political systems impinge greatly on how we operate as health care professionals and how sick people are provided for.

Working in cultures so very different to my own helped me see the similarities and differences of ill health and human suffering. Also I learnt to know that I, in my role as nurse, could transcend many of these differences and adapt to numerous people, places and situations and reach out to offer assistance, kindness and empathy. These are virtues I continue to strive for in my role as academic and educator.

My introduction to work in palliative care, looking back, was no accident. After my travels I returned to Australia and began working in palliative care in 1989. The person centered approach that palliative care offered was in stark contrast to the alienating health care I had worked in other countries and Australia. The switch from working in acute care environments and actively saving lives to palliative care and accepting death happened quiet quickly for me. Literally one week I worked at a university hospital in the USA where it seemed no one was able...
to die, and the next week I was personally confronted with patients who were probably more comfortable with death than I was at that time. With the guidance of extremely skilled clinicians and very generous patients and families I learnt all I could about providing health care at the end of life. I worked for over 10 years as community and inpatient palliative care nurse in Sydney and Adelaide.

I was trained as a nurse in the hospital system before tertiary requirements were the norm. I completed a Social Science and Policy Degree with honours in 1995 at the University of New South Wales. Now as I teach students, some of whom are new to the demands of tertiary studies, I always remember how challenging and rewarding my tertiary studies were to me. At Flinders University we uphold the importance of academic rigor, evidence based practice and critical thinking across all our topics and courses and we endeavour to recognize the potential and respect the background of each student that comes to us to learn.

Why does quality education matter?

The landscape of health care systems and knowledge relevant to palliative care shifts rapidly. This means we all must keep up with many changes that occur in order to offer quality health care to patients and families. At Flinders we recognise that many students struggle to understand Information Communication Technology, how to access quality evidence and translate that evidence into their practice. To meet this knowledge gap we now teach these skills and knowledge to every single student who comes to learn with us. It is extremely satisfying to see health professional students take on the challenge of learning that will positively impact on the palliative care that they deliver. Higher degree studies will greatly enhance the professional capacity of those who choose to return to study.

Other opportunities exist too for those professionals who wish to understand, in a more informal way, how to use relevant, quality evidence. **My Learning** is a free on-line educational resource within CareSearch that has been developed for self directed learning by nurses, allied health and medical practitioners, and others. **My Learning** is designed to introduce the valuable information that CareSearch has to offer.