

CATHY CARRASCO

APNA Nurse of the Year, Cathy Carrasco, is widely regarded as an extremely experienced registered nurse with a wealth of knowledge. At her clinic, she has been an advocate for the important role of nurses and the invaluable contribution they make to the medical community.

Could you briefly explain your nursing journey and how you got into nursing?

I've wanted to be a nurse ever since I was six years old. As a child, I contracted septicaemia and was admitted to hospital for three weeks. During this time I remember being looked after by nurses, and wanted to do the same for others when I grew up. The night duty nurses were the best. It was such a treat to be allowed to sit in the nurses' station (in the middle of the night) drinking hot chocolate and eating jam on toast with them. At the time I really liked those little hats they used to wear, thank goodness we don't have to wear them now!

After completing my study at Korowa Anglican Girls School, I took up Bachelor of Nursing at Monash University and graduated in 1994 as part of the first cohort of university trained nurses in Victoria.

I spent many years working in intellectual disability, then in alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and mental health at Delmont Private Hospital. After having my three girls I spent a few years working night shift in aged care and in drug and alcohol rehabilitation. In 2003, I began working as a practice nurse at a clinic in Doveton and eventually moved to Carnegie Medical Centre, where I am currently working.

How long have you worked in primary health care and why did you choose this area of nursing?

I have worked in primary health care for around 15 years now. I took on the role primarily because I was able to choose my hours which was fantastic for the mother of three small children. A friend of mine knew a general practitioner who was looking for a nurse. He had not had a practice nurse before and although I was happy working my night duties, they were very persuasive in employing me in their general practice. They allowed me to set up the practice nurse program myself and choose my own hours. I remember being terrified, knowing nothing about primary health care and feeling totally out of my depth. Over time, I learnt a lot and became more confident in my role as a practice nurse. I later moved to my current practice which was closer to home. Carnegie Medical Centre has allowed me to work autonomously within my scope of practice.

What do you enjoy most about being a nurse in primary health care?

In all honesty I really love the practice that I work at. I love my colleagues, they are like family to me. I enjoy the relationships that I am able to establish with our patients and their extended families. The practice embraces a very holistic approach to patient health care, and my role allows me to play an important part in that care. I think one of my most important and enjoyable roles is visiting all of our patients (over 75 of them) for a home health assessment. The insight that is gained by visiting patients in their own home is very valuable to the general practitioners at our clinic. Patients are often much more relaxed in their own homes and are happy to disclose any difficulties they are having. During these visits I am able to see how patients are coping at home, whether they are eating adequately and whether they need to be linked with any services that might help them.

I have been able to set up a comprehensive system for delivering cycles of care for patients with enhanced primary care and general practice management plans. I feel that this program plays a huge role in the holistic approach that our clinic aspires to follow for our patients.

Moreover, I have worked hard to develop close relationships with many of the maternal child health nurses in our local area, and as a result I see many of our young families for immunisations and other issues.

At our clinic I am also able to provide services for suturing, and assist with minor medical procedures which gives our patients an alternative to waiting for hours at emergency departments.

I also cannulate and deliver iron infusions—that patients often have a 10-week wait for in the hospital setting—but are able to have in the clinic within a matter of days after receiving results.

What is the one thing all primary health care nurses should know?

That the work that they do and the role that they play in primary health care is extremely important (even if they think it's not). And that continued professional development and networking is key! Always upskill wherever possible.



What are you passionate about at work?

Everything that I do! I feel that I am part of a clinic that allows me to deliver a very high standard of care to all our patients.

Who has been a role model for you in your career? Tell us about him or her?

My first clinical educator at the Alfred Hospital when I was studying nursing. She taught us so much in such a short space of time. She used the debriefing sessions to teach us so many useful things which I still draw on today.

What does success look like to you and how do you measure it?

I think success is a reflection of the level of patient satisfaction that I am able to play some part in. Positive feedback from patients and their families and knowing that I have made a difference in someone's life is my idea of success.