



Nurses & Midwives: The Heart of our Healthcare

When I began my training as a nurse and then as a midwife, the specifics of the roles, and opportunities for nurses and midwives, were quite different.

Since this time, the treatments and care, career pathways, and the scope of practice of our nursing and midwifery workforce has moved forward in wonderful and progressive ways. What has not changed are the people drawn to these professions.

Nurses and midwives are hardworking, dedicated, and passionate advocates for their patients, colleagues and communities.

I am proud to be the leader of Nursing and Midwifery services in Hunter New England Local Health District, leading almost 10,000 nurses and midwives in our services across our District. Each year on 5 May we celebrate International Day of the Midwife, with International Nurses Day following on 12 May.

The theme for this year's International Nurses Day is *Our Nurses, Our Future*, which aims to recognise the important and developing role nurses hold in our healthcare system.

One of the favourite parts of my role is welcoming and nurturing the future of our workforce. This year we employed a record number of graduates who completed their study at our partner tertiary institutions including, the University of Newcastle, and some from farther afield. The passion they have already shown for their work and patients has truly humbled me.

We are also leaders in the school-based traineeship program, boasting the largest number of NSW Health trainees in the state. This program allows young people to undertake paid work in their local hospital whilst completing their HSC. It's essential that we continue to foster young passion and talent to ensure the growth of our workforce.

I'd also like to make special mention of our nursing and midwifery colleagues who embed themselves in our regional and rural communities. From Denman to Dungog, Boggabilla to Bundarra, our nurses and midwives have a special connection with their patients that extends long after they are discharged from our care. Their patients are known community members and, at times, family and friends. Our staff take this responsibility in their stride and I'm proud of the quality care they continue to provide.

Knowing how important our nurses and midwives are to these communities, we have supported many nurses in completing our rural specialist nurse pathway, a program that upskills registered nurses to provide holistic, advanced patient care as rural generalists.

We also boast the largest number of nurse practitioners in the state, with almost 90 nurse practitioners and transitional nurse practitioners working across 17 subspecialties – these roles are a key part of the future of nursing.

Nurse practitioners are advanced registered nurses with the experience, expertise and authority to diagnose and treat a variety of acute or chronic health conditions. From working in Maitland Hospital emergency department providing advanced emergency care to ensure patients are treated and discharged sooner, to nurse practitioners offering specialist oncology support in Armidale, and those working in the Hunter Valley treating substance use problems.

I cannot speak on health and regional health, without acknowledging our midwifery workforce, who we also celebrate on International Day of the Midwife (May 5).

This year's theme is *Together Again: From evidence to reality*. It's a chance for us to reflect on the evidence that shows the importance of investing in our midwives.

Our midwives are here for our mothers and their families, helping to support them in their pregnancy, birthing and post-natal periods. This includes our Aboriginal Maternal Infant Health Service (AMIHS) which provides women, and their families' culturally safe, respectful and comprehensive care.

I had the pleasure of traveling to Inverell earlier this year to celebrate our rural midwifery graduates. This program, run in partnership with Charles Sturt University, allows our experienced nurses to gain their graduate diploma in midwifery. More than 180 midwives have graduated from the program in our District, with around 75 per cent continuing to work in our facilities, strengthening our regional maternity units.

Any family who has birthed with one of our midwifery group practices will tell you the relationship they have with their midwife is treasured. Our Belmont midwifery group practice recently had their 1000th home birth, which speaks volumes about the team and the broader value midwives provide to women and their families.

International Day of the Midwife and International Nurses Day are a chance to celebrate this essential part of our health team. I acknowledge the challenges our health system and our valued and passionate nurses and midwives have experienced these past few years, and thank them for their unwavering kindness and care they continue to provide.

To all our nurses and midwives working across Hunter New England Local Health District - you are the heart of our healthcare system. You are the compassion, the efficiency and the future of health, and without you, we could not provide care and treatment to the almost one million patients we see each year.

Thank you for all that you do for our patients and our community.

This article by Hunter New England Health's Executive Director, Clinical Services, Nursing and Midwifery, Elizabeth Grist, first appeared in the Newcastle Herald on 6 May 2022.