

Nurses and Midwives: acknowledging their unique role

In the past year, nurses and midwives across Hunter New England Local Health District provided care during 2.3 million patient visits and delivered more than 8,000 babies.

As one of the largest Local Health Districts in NSW, our nurses and midwives are responsible for providing care to more than 920,000 people across the Hunter, Lower Mid North Coast and New England regions.

They are the backbone of our health system and care for people in some of the most exciting and challenging times of their lives.

Each year in May we celebrate our nurses and midwives, and the contribution they make to our communities – with International Day of the Midwife on 5 May, and International Day of the Nurse on 12 May.

With the last two years of the pandemic behind us and the opportunity to reflect – now is the time to re-examine what it means to be a healthcare professional and what the future may hold.

Recent stories in the media paint a picture of a health system under pressure, and in many ways it has been. While the pandemic has created a collective weariness that transcends the health industry, it has forced us to rethink the way we deliver healthcare.

As a consequence, we created new opportunities for our staff that weren't there before – opportunities for nurses and midwives to upskill, specialise or use technology to improve practices.

Nurses went above and beyond their role as clinicians, advocates, educators and counsellors.

We trained generalist nurses in critical care to free up beds in the intensive care unit and provided a higher level of service on the ward. We used *Hospital in the Home* to treat patients remotely, and used technology to continue antenatal classes and consultant appointments. We moved some staff training to an online platform, which had a great benefit in making training more accessible to our rural and regional staff – many of these new ways of working will remain in future.

Nurses and midwives from Newcastle and Tamworth were redeployed to assist our smaller facilities. Midwives from John Hunter went to Moree, and nurses from Tamworth went to Walcha, bringing new skills and knowledge that wasn't there previously.

We created roles for undergraduate nurses, offering an amazing opportunity for them to upskill and work alongside those with a lifetime of experience. They worked front-of-house, supported senior nurses where needed, and were an essential part of vaccination hubs across our District – assisting with duties that freed up our nurses to be on the floor to offer essential care to our patients.

Some nurses also came out of retirement to help with the pandemic response, meaning we had generations of nurses working together and sharing invaluable skills and knowledge.

In my 47 years as a nurse and midwife, I've never seen more staff come together with one goal – stepping up when needed to support our community.

This is how I know the future of nursing and midwifery is bright and the workforce will move forward with a new-found resilience.

It has never been an easy job, but its importance cannot be understated.

There have been many a thank you and celebration for our nurses and midwives throughout the pandemic, and after time they can often lose their impact. But this May, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge each and every one of you.

For your composure in the face of uncertainty. For your dedication and hard work to ensure the continuation of critical services during trying times. For your innovation and forward-thinking. And most importantly, for your kindness and compassion.

You are the lifeblood of the healthcare system – you help bring new life into the world, provide comfort during the final breaths, and all the moments in between. Collectively you make up more than half our workforce which means you are one of the key drivers of our frontline care.

Let's celebrate the highs and lows because this is what makes the workforce what it is today. One that's changing the face of healthcare for the future.

The care you provide leaves a mark on families that lasts long after they leave our services and you have my heartfelt thanks.

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