

COMMUNITY PALLIATIVE CARE NURSING IN THE GRAMPIANS REGION

National Dying to Know Day on August 8th is an annual campaign to encourage people to start having conversations about death and improve their knowledge regarding end of life choices. We would like to take this opportunity to highlight the teams and nurses providing great community palliative care services within our region.

Ballarat Hospice Care

We assist people with a life limiting illness to stay at home. We support the carers, friends and family who help care for them. We aim to support people to feel safe; to enhance quality of life; and work with the patient, carer and family to achieve choices on how to live and die.

We offer

- in home specialist palliative care nursing
- 24 hour nursing support
- volunteer support
- support to make current and future care choices
- carer and patient education
- equipment loan to enhance comfort and safety.

We can

- educate and advocate
- liaise with GPs, community care and health services
- offer welfare support
- offer emotional and spiritual care and bereavement support.

Our services are at no direct charge to the patient as funding is provided through the Victorian Department of Health, supplemented by donations and grants from our generous community.



Introducing Sarah Brennan, Community Palliative Care Nurse who joined the Ballarat Hospice Care team early this year. Sarah came to Ballarat Hospice Care with 21 years paramedic experience at Ambulance Victoria and four years nursing experience in aged care, palliative care, school nursing and immunisation.

Sarah's love for palliative care grew from a palliative care elective taken during her nursing degree. A community placement at Bacchus Marsh in palliative care was the inspiration she needed to then seek a palliative care experience during her grad year. Sarah was fortunate to work for four months at Gandarra. Sarah has always loved the experience and philosophy of palliative care and Ballarat Hospice Care has been very fortunate to have Sarah join the team.

Central Grampians Palliative Care

Central Grampians Palliative Care is based in Ararat with our office at East Grampians Health Service. Our region covers three shires – Ararat Rural City, Pyrenees Shire and Northern Grampians Shire, which includes St Arnaud, Avoca, Redbank, Lexton, Waubra, Beaufort, Skipton, Lake Bolac, Wickliffe, Willaura, Ararat, Halls Gap, Stawell and Navarre. So, we cover a reasonably large area and work closely with Beaufort, Skipton, St Arnaud, Maryborough, Ararat and Stawell District Nursing teams. We are also continually supported by the Grampians Regional Palliative Care Team.

Our team is made up of five part-time staff members. Helen Lusby and I, Leesa McKinnis, are currently the temporary team leaders in a job share position. Sharon Spalding and Jenny Cole have been a part of the team for several years, and we have recently welcomed new staff member Jess Seres. So it's all girl power in Ararat at the moment.

I'm often asked how I ended up working in Palliative Care. Like many people it's been a combination of lots of things that brought me to where I am today. I started my nursing career back in the '80s working at Ballarat Health Services and after graduating began working in the old Q1, a medical ward, just as oncology was starting at BHS. Back then oncology patients were admitted at least overnight for treatment and fluids as our only antiemetics were Maxolon and Stemetil. We have come a long way since then.

I have spent most of my 37 years of nursing working in oncology and district nursing and as such, I am no stranger to symptom management, difficult conversations, death, dying and supporting families at home. However, it was probably when my sisters, father and I nursed my mother at home until her death from breast cancer, that I really felt it was something I wanted to do.

Five years ago, a position came up in palliative care and with my kids growing up, it was time for a change. Working in palliative care is some of the most rewarding and at times most frustrating nursing I have ever done. Every patient provides their own unique challenges, and we are always thinking, adapting and personalising our care so that we can support our patients and their families to the best of our abilities. Distance, lack of services and support often mean we need to be creative as to how we go about this but one thing for sure is, it is never boring.

Things you don't know about me: I'm married to a farmer Greg and have three adult sons Luke, Ben and Nick. I enjoy 4 wheel driving and camping trips with family and friends and can often be found in the high country on long weekends. I love musical theatre and go to shows as often as I can. My maiden name was Nitschke (no relation) so maybe my destiny to Palliative Care was pre-decided.



Wimmera Palliative Care



Introducing Nicole

My name is Nicole Miller and I am relatively new to the nursing profession. A change in career from a freelance photographer, just before my 40th birthday. Initially my nursing career was in health promotion (nice mash-up of my working life collective) but due to COVID I was redeployed in 2020 by the hospital to work in palliative care.

You could hardly have had a nursing career looking at more different ends of the health spectrum. Most of my health promotion role was based in settings with young people. To be honest I did feel a little out of my depth. During my "gifted time" to the unit, I found palliative care work to be rewarding and the nurses in my team very special and knowledgeable professionals. Nurses I aspired to be like. I was challenged and enjoyed learning how to best assist people leaving this world – their best way possible.

I decided to stay nursing in palliative care. It is such important work, and the personal rewards are great. The joy of being able to really listen to one's story and being able to advocate for what is important to them towards the end of their life. To facilitate a dying man's wish to hear the last post on the bugle for a final Anzac Day service, or arrange a flight for a woman with end stage cancer to return to Queensland to die surrounded by her family, instead of alone - during COVID state border lockdowns.

The response is very much the same when people ask what your job is – *'I could never do that'* *'It must be hard'* *'How do you do that?'* But what an honour to nurse in this space and to really have a positive impact to the end of someone's life here on earth.

Western Health – Bacchus Marsh Palliative Care



Co-ordinated care services are offered for people with a life limiting illness and support for their family at home. Care and support is offered including equipment, pain relief and management of other symptoms, and aims to be flexible and sensitive to the wishes and needs of clients and also their families. The service has a counsellor, who co-ordinates volunteers and bereavement services in Bacchus Marsh, Ballan and surrounding areas as well as offering social work services to families using the palliative care service. Trained volunteer support workers are available as required. Sandi, Darren and Emily bring extensive knowledge and experience in palliative care and Sandi is also currently completing her Masters in Palliative Care. The service covers the Moorabool Shire region which includes Bacchus Marsh, Ballan and the surrounding area.