

REFLECTIONS ON 2020

I am sure that most of you, like me, woke up on the 1st of January - wide eyed and bushy tailed ☺ and thought about all you would achieve in the year ahead. For me, this exciting, sparkly new decade needed some New Year resolutions and planning!

Let me share my wish list of what I wanted to achieve this year:

1. Travel - perhaps overseas if I am lucky (will have to sell some of those useless Zoom shares first) but definitely throughout this great country of ours
2. Connect with family and friends - not just calling them but I really want to spend time with them regularly, those that live near or far, I will make more of an effort to get out there. Mmmm perhaps a really large family gathering is on the cards?
3. As much as I want to travel throughout Australia, I really want to concentrate on seeing my own capital city - Melbourne and perhaps invest in a yearly membership to a theatre club
4. I will go to the footy more - nothing like watching the Mighty Pies in the GF at the MCG - can't picture this year it being any other way
5. I will make the most of watching my children play local football and netball on the weekends.

Maybe I've been rather facetious there but you get my point - we all had plans both personally and professionally that haven't worked out the way we envisioned, due to COVID-19. What is interesting to me is how many of us have dealt with this so differently. There are many words that would describe 2020 – for me as a manager of both the Aged Care Assessment Service and GRPCT, resilience would be very apt.



Perhaps one positive to come out of COVID-19 is that “the way we’ve always done it” attitude to the care and support we give to the field of palliative care has been questioned, and that isn’t always a bad thing. We have had to change our perceptions about how we deliver a service like Grampians Regional Palliative Care to our patients, their families and the services in the Grampians that require our consults. This has provided us with challenges as we navigated virtual care but also allowed us to try delivering care differently, and led us to being surprised that there are aspects about this year that we don’t want to give up.

I have heard stories about how each and every palliative care service in the Grampians has risen to the challenges 2020 has presented, not least GRPCT, who despite these challenges has shown that we as a team are adaptable.

So what did we need to change and what were our achievements in 2020?

- The biggest change for us as a team was the way we consulted to the region. Prior to this year we were regularly visiting our regional partners throughout the Grampians region. As it became clearer that this was not going to be a safe way to consult, we started to think about how we could still connect and support the region virtually. MS Teams meetings or picking up the phone became the norm.

- The working from home directive was introduced by Ballarat Health Services (BHS) and as a small, close team this was particularly challenging – we didn't have the day to day debriefing or support from each other that we were used to. Our wellbeing as a team became the focus. We implemented daily morning chats/handovers and enjoyed a very successful after hours Zoom catch-up but our wellbeing as a team has continued to be a work in progress as we balance our physical health with our mental health.
- Dr Penny Cotton led the way in the region and indeed, Victoria, with her guidelines titled: COVID-19 and End of Life Care, A guide for health professionals caring for patients with COVID-19 in the Grampians Region, Victoria, Australia. This is such an informative piece of work of which Penny should be very proud.
- Regina Kendall is the clinical lead in rural and regional Australia for the Carer Help National Reference group. Their website is up and running and updated with COVID-19 guidelines for carers - if you haven't had a look, I would recommend you do.
- GRPCT are committed to clinical research, and despite COVID-19 we have ethics approval for our Aged Care Cancer Research Project.
- Ballarat Hospice Care, GRPCT and BHS are collaborating on a research project called *Rapid Discharge: Sustainable Service Integration to meet the choices of people requiring palliative care and wanting to be discharged from acute hospital to home for ongoing care and to die at home.* This project aims to strengthen healthcare support systems in the Ballarat and surrounding area to assist health care professionals, palliative care patients, their families, and carers in providing a smooth, safe and timely transition from acute hospital to home for patients at the end of life who wish to receive end-of-life care in the comfort of their own home. We look forward to progressing this project and working closely with Ballarat Hospice Care, who are the lead agency.
- Despite COVID-19 we are still committed to bringing the 2021 Palliative Care Conference to fruition. Next year's conference is called "Where the Wild Things Are – At the Fringes of Palliative Care", We are as yet unsure if this will be held virtual or face to face. It is focusing on Palliative Care that is outside of the norm and promises to be interesting. So far, our speakers include those working with homelessness and in the prison system to name two.
- Not least for the GRPCT, Jade Odgers has been seconded away from GRPCT and is busy as a project officer for BHS@Home. Whilst this is a great opportunity for Jade, the team were devastated that Jade would be taking time out from managing the service. I commenced as interim manager back in June of this year and have had a steep learning curve in the world of palliative care. I have enjoyed my time immensely.

I would personally like to thank the Grampians Regional Palliative Care team for making me feel so welcome and a part of this close group from the beginning. I said when I started that I didn't know palliative care in depth, but I am in awe of the work that you all do and the professionalism with which it is undertaken. A question on the BPA survey, completed recently by BHS staff members, asked if we would recommend BHS to our family and friends - well I hope I never need to; but I would be very proud to recommend both services I manage to my friends and family. You are all an absolute credit to the field of palliative care.

To all our stakeholders, we wish you a safe and relaxing Christmas and New Year's. Fingers crossed 2021 is slightly less stressful than 2020. We look forward to working with you to achieve best practice in palliative care throughout 2021.

Rachel Fishlock

Manager GRPCT & ACAS
Ballarat Health Services

CONTACTS

Grampians Regional Palliative Care Team
Ph 5320 3553 Fax 5320 6493

Ballarat Hospice Care Inc
Ph 5333 1118 Fax 5333 1119

Central Grampians Palliative Care
Ph 5352 9465 Fax 5352 9425

Djerriwarrh Palliative Care
Ph 5367 9137 Fax 5367 4274

Gandarra Palliative Care Unit
Ph 5320 3895 Fax 5320 3763

Wimmera Palliative Care
Ph 5381 9363 Fax 5362 3480

Grampians Region Palliative Care Consortium Ph 0428 737 330

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