

# Secure Your Mask – Nurses and Midwives Urged to Take Care

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The nurses and midwives we see at the Victorian Nurses Health Program (VNHP) tend to neglect and sacrifice their own health and wellbeing for the sake of others. While this is a commendable characteristic, the responsibility for our health must start with each of us.

I'm Glenn Taylor, a registered nurse and CEO of the VNHP. This is the first in a regular series in the Australian Nursing Journal. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise these important issues around nurses' and midwives' health and excited to provide you with what I hope will be practical and helpful insights.

The VNHP was established in August 2006 to provide advice, support and case management to nurses, midwives and students of nursing facing challenges presented by substance use. We expanded our scope in June 2007 due to a demand to support the needs of those with mental health concerns.

We work with individual nurses and midwives to provide confidential assessment, treatment and referral to a variety of services including counselling and financial support, case management, peer support groups and general support regarding industry issues.

We offer advice and guidance to managers and employers who suspect one of their employees is facing these challenges and needs advice regarding how best to support staff.

The health impacts that alcohol and drug issues and mental health concerns have on our colleagues in the industry is of real concern to us. We work closely with nurses and midwives whose health is being adversely affected as a direct result of their substance use and or the stress and anxiety they are experiencing at the time.

In using an analogy to highlight the need to care for our own health I think of the instructions we receive from flight attendants in the pre-departure safety rundown. 'In the case of reduced cabin pressure oxygen masks will fall from the ceiling'. We are directed to secure and activate our own mask before assisting a child or dependent.

'Securing your mask' as a practising nurse or midwife is akin to taking all adequate measures to ensure you are best equipped to provide care for your patient, client or consumer. This might mean getting more rest, taking more exercise, slowing things down for a few days or just meeting up with a trusted friend for a chat over a coffee. You are your greatest asset. It is important for everyone in your professional and personal life that you take the time to secure your mask on a regular basis.