

# Collegial Support Critical for Nurse and Midwife Health

Australian Nursing Journal November 2010

More than 800 nurses and midwives from around Victoria and interstate gathered in Melbourne recently for the inaugural VNHP Nurses & Midwives Wellness Conference.

An outstanding nurse from Queensland, Toni Hoffman, gave an inspiring keynote address. Toni is the Bundaberg based nurse who in 2003 became concerned with the clinical practice of Dr Jayant Patel. In the ensuing years Toni took it upon herself to raise her concerns with management and others in positions of authority. Toni's concerns were largely ignored and unsupported in her efforts to protect patients.

In her address to the conference Toni spoke of feeling alone and isolated throughout this time. She was unsure of what to do or where to seek support. She began to doubt herself and her judgement and on reflection says this experience had a detrimental effect on her health.

Beyond acknowledging the impact this experience had on her wellbeing, Toni has moved forward to consider what is needed in our profession to strengthen the system and nurture our colleagues.

Her message is simple. We must stand up and support each other. We need to ensure the profession thrives and that nurses and midwives are united. We must find the time and resources needed to assist each other practically, mentally and emotionally, in what can be an incredibly challenging and demanding industry.

Toni promotes the principles of working together, identifying individuals in the profession who will be advocates and not leaving our colleagues to fend for themselves. She has experienced firsthand the burden of isolation and understands the negative impact it can have on an individual.

We now understand as a society how important it is to be connected to others. We know that people who are connected to support systems and have people and places they trust at their disposal will live longer and healthier lives. We know that the opposite is also true.

Unfortunately at the VNHP we see the poor health outcomes experienced by nurses, midwives and students who have not had the support they need. At times we witness the results of direct isolation or poor behaviour displayed by some individuals toward others in our profession.

Isolating, ignoring or treating a colleague badly can have a detrimental effect on their self-esteem. Confidence and self worth can be damaged – at times irreparably – and this can result in significant health impairment.

It is our individual and collective responsibility to make ourselves available to our colleagues in the profession to do what Toni Hoffman suggests. Stand up and support each other. Collegial support is critical for nurse and midwife health!