



BY **GLENN TAYLOR** CEO, VICTORIAN NURSES HEALTH PROGRAM

nurses' health

TACKLING ALCOHOL ADDICTION

Being a member of one of the most trusted professions in the country can be burdensome if an individual believes they are underperforming in their role. This burden can increase when they realise their performance is impaired due to behaviours they think they should be able to control.

Nurses and midwives who present to the VNHP for help with substance use issues invariably bring with them feelings of guilt, shame and isolation. This is usually related to the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with their substance use.

In early 2009 Jill (*not her real name) presented to the VNHP for help with her alcohol addiction. She realised her health was suffering as a result of her alcohol consumption and

ultimately feared harming a patient in her care if this behaviour continued.

Her decision to contact the VNHP came early one morning when on arriving at work Jill was experiencing nausea and a mild tremor after a heavy night of drinking. Jill had seen VNHP promotional material in the staff room and decided to call for help.

Jill was assessed by a VNHP case manager the next day. This meeting identified multiple losses in her life including a divorce; her adult son and young grandson moving away from Melbourne; and the death of a parent in 2007 which she'd not worked through. Jill admitted to past episodes of depression over the previous decade which had been successfully treated with medication and counselling.

Jill's assessment enabled her, with the help of her VNHP case manager to draft a plan to assist in restoring her health. This involved; referral to a substance withdrawal service for

a supported withdrawal; attending the VNHP Monday night support group designed for nurses and midwives with substance use concerns; meeting regularly with her case manager for help with her recovery; engaging her GP and referral to a psychologist to address her suspected depression and issues of loss.

Jill took two weeks leave from work and embraced the plan she had designed. She committed herself to acting on each item in her plan and within a couple of weeks was feeling in control of her life again. Jill said in hindsight her health had suffered due to bottling up her issues and not sharing her problems and worries with a family member or trusted friend. She identified the key to her success and improved health as staying connected to her supports.

Fifteen months later Jill is well, has remained sober and enjoys a productive work and social life.

You can contact the VNHP on (03) 9415 7514 for support with your sensitive health issues.

*THE NAME OF THE PERSON IDENTIFIED IN THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN CHANGED FOR PRIVACY REASONS

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