

'Nurses' bravery and compassion on show'

Australian Nursing Journal August 2011

The NMHPV attended the ANF Victorian Branch 'Professional Issues' conference in Melbourne recently. It was a great opportunity to participate in an event which exposed us to many diverse areas of practice and provided us with valuable industry updates from the ANF, Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and Victorian Nursing and Midwifery Office.

As part of the program the NMHPV was invited by the ANF conference organisers to participate in a panel discussion titled, 'Should Victorian nurses and midwives be part of a national health program?' The panel was mediated by Philip Gardner, from Ryan, Carlisle, Thomas Lawyers, and included Lisa Fitzpatrick, ANF, Victorian branch secretary, Richard Mullaly, AHPRA Victorian state manager, a director of nursing who has supported a nurse employee through a NMHPV episode of care, a nurse who has previously been a NMHPV service user and myself.

Apart from being a valuable way of discussing the very important topic of nursing and midwifery health in a national context, it also promoted the service for many of our colleagues who weren't aware of our existence. Importantly, it also reinforced to me the value and benefits our service provides and why we must continue to offer an industry specific health service.

Quite simply the hour long panel discussion struck a chord with many in the audience. A courageous handful present felt compelled to step forward to the microphone and in the presence of more than 1,000 colleagues disclose details of some of their most personal and harrowing experiences.

One spoke of her complete despair and a plan for suicide. Another spoke of the most tragic loss of her adult child. The feeling in the room was quite extraordinary. Everyone I spoke with later felt a great sense of care, support, empathy and compassion for these brave colleagues.

Leading into the day I was full of admiration and gratitude for my fellow panellist who had experienced the NMHPV as a service user. In my opinion it took a lot of courage to sit before so many and admit she needed help with her health issues. She explained to me later that she felt an obligation to our colleagues to publicly highlight her experience to others in our profession.

In doing so she hoped that others would feel safe to do the same. I too share this hope. That evening, as I reflected on the day's events I felt even greater admiration and gratitude for this person and to all those brave people who had the courage to step forward and provide us with an insight into their personal lives.

To our panellist and those in the audience who gave us this insight, thank you. I am confident by sharing your stories it will make others in need feel more comfortable and confident to pick up the phone and ask for help.

Contact the Nursing & Midwifery Health Program Victoria on 03 9415 7551 or visit our website www.nmhp.com.au