

Patty Hodder



Patty Hodder has achieved a lot in her career, but her passion for supporting people at the end of life has stood unwavering.

The beginning of palliative care in Victoria

Patty trained as a nurse at The Alfred Hospital in the late 50's. From here she had a number of other roles across Melbourne, eventually becoming involved in the very first pilot program of palliative care in Victoria at Melbourne City Mission.

“I had been interested in good patient care since the start of my career, and concerned about pain management and the care of those who were dying. The work of Dame Cicely Saunders at St Christopher's Hospice was becoming available, also that of Dr Elizabeth Kubler Ross. I was given

the opportunity to attend a workshop for health professionals that Dr Elizabeth Kubler Ross ran in the late 1970's, and following that undertook training through Peter MacCallum Hospital in Clinical Pastoral Education in 1979.”

“Around this time, the Kellogg Foundation, Melbourne City Mission and the Commonwealth Government were looking to start a trial palliative care service, which was to be the very first palliative care service in Victoria.”

“I recall meeting with Katherine Kingsbury who was the Director for Nursing at MCM, and expressed my interest in being involved.”

“I started as a part time home care nurse in the very first intake of staff at Melbourne City Mission in March 1981, where I stayed for five years. In late 1981, I become the Home Care Coordinator, which included the development of the volunteer and bereavement support program.”

“One person in particular who was key in the program was Dr John Buchanan. His commitment to patient care and education was paramount to the development of the palliative care holistic model, both at Melbourne City Mission and the new programs starting out.

“I was also involved in talks, lectures and conference papers, as well as supporting colleagues in Geelong and Adelaide as new palliative care programs were developed.

After leaving Melbourne City Mission, Patty became a project manager at the Cancer Council – then known as the Anti-Cancer Council – where she reviewed the telephone support line. She then moved onto St Joseph’s Tower Nursing Home in Kew, where she was the Director for eight years, creating a palliative care model for the nursing home.

Patty’s impact on palliative care also extends outside of paid work. Across the years, she has been involved in many committees, held positions on boards and also worked in the education space. Most recently, she was on the Board at Palliative Care South East a position she held for 10 years. She is also a Life Member with Palliative Care Victoria, an honour she received in 2006.

Career highlights

There have been many highlights across Patty’s career, including her time at Palliative Care South East, her involvement in the voluntary assisted dying bill at a board level, meeting Dame Cecily Saunders, and receiving a Life Membership from Palliative Care Victoria in 2006.

However, one of the most memorable times for Patty was the book she co-edited with Anne Turley titled *‘The creative option of palliative care: a manual for health care professionals.’*

“We got some of our colleagues on board across a range of disciplines and they helped us to create the book. We ended up self-publishing it which was a lot of work, but was a best seller. It has also been translated into Japanese, which was hugely exciting.”

“Another highlight from my time would definitely have to be the introduction of the Graduate Diploma of Cancer Nursing and Palliative Care at La Trobe University. I chaired the advisory committee for the program.”

Changes in the sector and hopes for the future

There have been many changes across the past 40 years, most of which Patty has seen first-hand. She also acknowledges that the sector will continue to grow in the next 40 years, which she says is “vitaly important”.

“People are living longer, so the need for palliative care will only continue to grow. Change and adjustment should take place as our society develops. The Florence Nightingale model of medical training, where the patient was at the bottom of the priority list, has certainly been left behind, which has been a significant positive change.”

“I think one of the key things that has helped the growth has been that palliative care is now recognised as a specialty discipline. There is also much more understanding about grief and support of loved ones thanks to palliative care.”