

# 40 STORIES IN 40 YEARS

## Jennifer Philip



Jennifer Philip has been working in the palliative care sector for 25 years. She initially started her career as a doctor working in consultative services, and is now the Chair of Palliative Medicine at University of Melbourne & St Vincent's Hospital.

“I commenced my career as a junior doctor in oncology. It took me a while to realise it, but the part I really liked about the job was the palliative care element. I liked being able to make a difference, especially when others were starting to say ‘well that’s it then’. I enjoyed being able to talk to people, hear about their lives, and I really valued the continuity of care.”

“At that time, you couldn’t really do palliative care training in Melbourne, so I went off to Sydney.”

“When I came back to Melbourne I took up a position at The Alfred as a palliative care doctor - the only palliative care doctor. I worked hard and set up the palliative care service at The Alfred where I stayed for a number of years. It was largely consultative work – seeing patients who were in the acute hospital and overlooking the palliative care component of their overall care.”

“I enjoyed it and loved the work. I felt like we’d really built a great thing, but I wasn’t confident I could continue solely doing clinical work for the rest of my days, so I did my PhD.”

“Since then, I’ve been lucky to marry research and clinical work in my job. In my current role, I am employed by the University of Melbourne and am about 80 per cent research and 20 per cent clinical work. I also do some mentorship and training and have clinical appointments at St Vincent’s, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

***“For me palliative is this humanist approach. It’s a very special and important type of care...”***

When it comes to palliative care, Jennifer believes it's a "one person to another type of care."

"The opportunity for things to be achieved, and for creativity, possibility and growth is very real in palliative care, which makes it a really special and important type of care."

"One of the things I love about palliative care is that you get to hear people's stories. I love hearing about the patient's life and what pieces they value. They teach me a lot, and hopefully I have been able to give back to them in return."

***"Palliative care is so much than just the last hours  
of someone's life."***

Jennifer also reflects on the key changes that have occurred within the sector, and things she would like to see change into the next 40 years.

"One of the big differences is that there are more people training in the area, and there is more recognition of palliative care as a specialist area – although not as much as there should be. There is also much more research than there used to be, including a lot more clinically based research."

Looking into the future, Jennifer is clear that as a society, "we need to become a lot more sophisticated in how we talk about advanced illness and that we will die at some point."

"It is essential that we take steps to talk about death, dying and end of life care so it's not a shock to us. We need to be more able to talk about it in a grown-up way and be open about what is important to us if, and when, we get a life limiting illness."

"Palliative Care Victoria has always been an essential part of this, and they should continue to lead the public discourse and positively shape the way society thinks about mortality."

For anyone wanting to enter the palliative care sector, Jennifer has a few words of wisdom.

"Be open to all those moments of possibility, that's where the creativity comes from. It's good and hard work so I strongly encourage people to have another thing they do as part of your professional world that can give you an additional alternative form of nourishment."