

## Katherine Kingsbury, OAM



As a lifelong advocate for good health care and ultimately a good death Katherine has spent her career as a nurse, looking after others. It was in part thanks to her determination back in 1978 that the Melbourne City Mission Hospice service came into being.

Katherine commenced her career working in busy teaching hospitals, where she saw that acute hospitals were geared towards curing and that no matter how well motivated the staff were there was never enough time to give the proper care that the dying needed.

Disillusioned with the large busy hospitals, she moved to a new and innovative service at The Social Planning Office in Fitzroy as a community nurse in 1975. Working with her staff, services were expanded so that frail aged residents and those with serious chronic illnesses had more chance of remaining at home rather than entering the old Mt. Royal Hospital in Parkville.

“Residents often lived in old, neglected cottages or in squalid rooming houses with few amenities. This early work stirred others to rethink the neglect that some sick and isolated people endured.”

Arising from this work and her advocacy for elderly and dying patients, Katherine was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1977 to visit services overseas. She worked in palliative care services in London, Montreal, San Francisco and Connecticut and quickly found an internationally linked community of people dedicated to improving end of life care. They were guided by the world leader and advocate for Palliative [Hospice] Care, Dr Cicely Saunders at St Christopher’s Hospice in London.

It was here that Katherine began to learn about a new system of care, not cure – palliative care. As well, Katherine attended a seven-day residential workshop with Dr Elizabeth Kubler Ross at Chicago, USA where loss, death and bereavement were discussed.

Returning to Australia, Katherine's Churchill report quickly became a book titled *"I Want to Die at Home"*. Book sales in Australia and New Zealand, along with publicity from media outlets, led to a heightened community awareness that there were better ways to provide end of life care as well as bereavement support to those who grieved.

***"Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come" –  
Victor Hugo***

There was one significant occasion which Katherine describes as a turning point for palliative care provision in Australia. In 1979 the Mercy Hospital East Melbourne, at the request of the Archbishop Frank Little, invited distinguished guests as well as senior staff from the welfare, aged care and the hospital sector to hear Katherine and a visiting nurse from St Christopher's Hospice speak about the benefits to dying patients and their families of the modern Palliative Care movement.

"After that day, heads of several agencies who were present to hear the talk expressed their interest to me in developing a service, but only the Rev Bruce Addison, CEO of Melbourne City Mission went on to make a commitment to do so."

"Soon after this I was appointed by Rev Addison as the Director of Nursing of a new nursing home in North Fitzroy. I also had a role in planning and developing the much hoped for Hospice program. It was 1979 and the search began to find a funding source for the new service."

In early 1980 Citymission was awarded a grant from the philanthropic organisation W.K. Kellogg Foundation USA to fund a two-year pilot program for the provision of a home-based palliative care service on condition that it would be the first in Australia. Katherine continued as the Director of Nursing and staff were sought to join the team.

The new palliative care service was officially opened in 1980 in North Fitzroy by the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. Mr Janes White, Consul General USA, representing the Kellogg Foundation was also present. That day Mr Fraser announced before a large media audience that he would give an additional \$150,000 to fund the new service for a third year. This event generated great and welcome publicity for Citymission's project.

According to Katherine, the setting up phase encountered many difficulties.

"GPs had to be assured that Hospice would not erode their livelihoods nor their relationships with their patients, if they agreed to enter into shared care with Hospice."

"The hospitals were guarded and sometimes hostile, as they perceived at least an implied criticism of their care of dying patients if they were to transfer them to the care of the new service. In addition, there were tensions which overseas programs had also experienced during the start-up phase, tension over undue haste in setting up, disagreement over policy, staff conflict, lack of health experience in the organisation, and at times a clash of values among staff and the organisation."

*“Gradually there has become more of an understanding that palliative care is a good thing and the words ‘palliative care’ have become more accepted in our language.”*

In early 1981, just seven months after the first patient had been admitted, Katherine was dismissed from her position, quite unexpectedly and no reason was given. It was a huge shock to her as it occurred without warning. Nevertheless, she remains very proud of everything she achieved in those early days. A palliative care service had been brought to fruition, one which would pave the way for those that were to follow.

There is no mistaking Katherine’s impact on palliative care and other services. She has played a part in the establishment of palliative care services in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. As well, she has had a role along with colleagues in supporting the start-up of other beneficial organisations such as the Very Special Kids children’s hospice with Margaret Noone and the Sudden Infant Death Research Foundation Inc. with Kaarene Fitzgerald. In 1985 Katherine was awarded an Order of Australia Medal.

After her dismissal she went on to establish an outreach program for the Salvation Army to provide for older men who made the streets and squats their homes. This followed the closure of their “homes” in institutions in Bundoora.

“We worked on the city streets to support them where they lived and slept. Funding for this program has continued to this day.”

Another highlight was spending 12 years on the Austin Hospital Board and being part of the planning and ultimately the building of the Olivia Newton-John Cancer (ONJ) Centre.

“The ONJ Centre became the highlight of my time at the Austin. Olivia Newton-John became the patron of this Centre and at her request, it went on to include a Wellness Space to benefit cancer patients being treated there.”

Katherine was also very involved in the early beginnings of the community-based Banksia Palliative Care Service in 1987 along with Dr Jones and others. It became operational in 1989 and proudly continues serving the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Into the future, Katherine hopes that the leaders of Palliative Care Victoria will continue to expand the range of service providers with whom they work. She hopes that these include chronically homeless men and women, men and women in prisons, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and elderly people living in residential care.