“On Jill’s desk is a picture her daughter drew of her. It shows a caring nurse which I believe depicts Jill very well – a person so devoted to the professions of nursing and midwifery that she would dedicate a career to being, then teaching, then leading, in both,” says Associate Professor Donna Waters of her long-time colleague.

When asked how her journey began, Jill remembers: “I decided to study nursing while I worked out what I really wanted to do, and, in the meantime, I utterly fell in love with the profession.

“Back then, the quality of education was poor. We had to work night shifts and juggle classes and our practical education often didn’t relate to what we were learning in class.

“Nurses have extraordinary responsibilities working with vulnerable people, and we weren’t necessarily equipped to make life-changing decisions. I think it was this experience that made me become an advocate for better education in nursing.”

Assuming her first academic position at the (then) Riverina College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University) in Wagga Wagga, Jill helped develop one of the first tertiary nursing programs in Australia.

“Soon after we launched the program, the New South Wales Government recognised the benefits of this more formal education and made tertiary education the only way to become a registered nurse in NSW. This sparked a change across Australia, which was looked on with admiration elsewhere in the world,” she reflects.
In 1994, Jill moved her family, including two young children, to New Zealand to become chair and professor of nursing and midwifery at Victoria University of Wellington. “It was one of those wonderful moments of serendipity,” says Jill of the move. “My husband had also been offered a professorship in New Zealand. It was in his home town and it represented an incredible opportunity for our careers and our family.”

Colleague Sally Tracy recalls those challenging days in health: “During that period there were groundbreaking changes in maternity following amendments to nursing legislation under Prime Minister Helen Clark. By 1997 more than 70 percent of New Zealand women were able to choose a midwife as their preferred primary provider of health care during pregnancy and birth.”

Returning to Australia in 1997, Jill was appointed dean and professor of nursing and midwifery at the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health, University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Determined to sustain the momentum she had built in New Zealand, Jill continued to champion midwifery. Dr Frances Hughes, former chief nurse of New Zealand, worked with Jill back in Sydney. She recalls that “UTS was the first faculty of nursing in Australia to recognise the professional status of midwifery by including it in the name of the faculty. This was a result of Jill’s vision and commitment to midwifery and health more broadly.”

In 2008, Jill moved to the University of Sydney as Dean of Sydney Nursing School. Here, her impact has been significant.

Associate Professor and Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) Heather McKenzie reflects on her colleague: “Jill is nowhere more passionate than in the education space and her achievements in the past seven years – during which she has led something of an education revolution in the faculty – are testament to her depth of knowledge and understanding, and her deep belief in the transformative power of education.

Under Jill’s leadership, we have been able to re-imagine our curricula for the future, infuse education with research (matching the University strategy), and instil in our students a sense of global citizenship and the importance of leadership.

Recognised as ‘well above world standard’ by Excellence in Research for Australia, research at Sydney Nursing School has flourished during Jill’s deanship. “It really is all about understanding the future direction of health care, and focusing on the impact nurses can have through collaborations which offer real-world solutions,” says Donna Waters. “Jill’s contribution and commitment to the development of research within the faculty will continue to be appreciated for many years to come.”

Aware of the opportunity to enhance the practice of nursing and extend the influence of Sydney Nursing School further afield, Jill has forged worldwide relationships. In Tonga, she assisted the Ministry of Health in the development of a program to train nurses in the prevention of non-communicable diseases.

“‘This partnership has been incredibly successful and the first Tongan doctoral scholar was recently made Chief Nurse of Tonga,” Jill says. “This work has opened the door to working with Tonga in a research capacity.”

In Vietnam, Jill and her colleagues have been working to develop a three-year course in midwifery, which will soon be offered at around 50 colleges and universities. She believes “this collaboration with UNPFA [the United Nations Population Fund] and the Ministry of Health in Vietnam has the potential to change the face of birthing in the whole country”.

Jill’s impact and influence on the wider nursing community is clear and “her involvement in nursing and midwifery policy and regulation has had significant impact at state, national and international levels”, says colleague, Professor of Nursing, Mary Chiarella.

In 2011, Jill received the Member of the Order of Australia medal in the Australia Day Honours list for service to nursing and midwifery. Of her esteemed colleague, Mary says “Jill has brought an incomparable amalgam of academic rigour, impeccable style and enduring grace to every organisation she has led.”

“She has the ability to motivate and lead by example, and is a strong advocate and a formidable adversary.”

Heather McKenzie adds that “perhaps Jill’s finest achievement in my view is the outstanding contribution she has made overall to health, through her uncompromising insistence on excellence in education, professional practice and health policy”.

So what is next for Australia’s first lady of nursing and midwifery? “I’ll be heading off to Geneva to work with the WHO [World Health Organization] and the International Council on Nursing Policy. In the second half of the year, I’ll be looking at the role of nursing in Obamacare at the University of Pennsylvania. Nurses see the real-world impact of health policy every day.

“I think we have a responsibility to input into and guide that policy and welcome the opportunity to do so.”

“Jill’s leadership and ability to provide creative strategies to address complex problems left us in a better place.”

DR FRANCES HUGHES
FORMER CHIEF NURSE OF NEW ZEALAND

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THE KIDS AREN’T ALL RIGHT – SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHEN A PARENT HAS CANCER

Earlier this year, Professor Kate White, NSW’s first Chair in Cancer Nursing, spoke about the journey a family, and specifically a child, goes through when a parent has cancer.

During a talk held on 24 September, and in a live interview with ‘Life Matters’ on ABC News, Kate, who is a researcher, academic and a cancer and palliative care nurse, addressed the audience on the importance of addressing the big C.

Kate says “parents often exclude children from conversations about cancer for a range of reasons, but the unintended impacts are that children can feel isolated and anxious.

“Parents withhold information because they want to protect their child, because they simply don’t know what to say, or they fear that becoming emotional would be distressing for their children.

“A diagnosis of cancer and the subsequent impact of hospital admissions and complex treatments have a huge impact on the normal functioning of a family. Managing day-to-day family life and one’s own emotional journey can be an enormous task. Children’s emotional needs can be overlooked during this time.”

Claudia Bonifer has been mindful of sharing age-appropriate information with her daughter Ella during her treatments for breast and ovarian cancer over the past three years.

“My husband and I thought it best that Ella knew I had cancer and that the treatments would bring a lot of physical changes,” says Claudia.

“Ella is a clever child – she knows when something is going on – and it would have been wrong to withhold information from her. Also, if my health deteriorated, I didn’t want her to be shocked or unprepared for bad news. We also wanted Ella to know that the doctors thought I had a very good chance of surviving the cancer.”

Claudia’s Cancer Council breast care nurse gave her resources designed to help talk to a child about cancer, which both Claudia and Ella found extremely useful.

Research shows that teenagers who have a parent with cancer have increased levels of emotional concern that can last well after treatments are finished. Researchers from CanTeen and Sydney Nursing School are testing a resilience-based intervention to assist this vulnerable group.

So what is Kate’s advice to families living through illness, and those working in any area of care? “It’s when families, schools and communities work together to help build resilience in our children and young people that they can gain the tools to cope with this difficult situation.

“This concept of building resilience can be expanded to be relevant to the diagnosis of any life-threatening disease and its impact on the family.”

To listen to a podcast of Kate White talking on this topic, visit sydney.edu.au/sydney_ideas/kate_white
Extroverted, agreeable and open – these are the attributes that make nurses successful in the demanding, fast-paced and often stressful environment of an emergency department, according to a new study by the University of Sydney.

Despite numerous studies about personalities of nurses in general, there has been little research done on the personalities of those in clinical specialty areas. Belinda Kennedy from Sydney Nursing School, a 15-year critical care veteran, led the study, which revealed that emergency nurses are a “special breed.”

“My years working as a critical care nurse have made me aware of the difficulty in retaining emergency nurses and I have observed apparent differences in personality among these specialty groups,” she says. “This prompted me to undertake this research, which is the first on this topic in more than 20 years.”

Belinda conducted the research with Associate Professor Kate Curtis and Associate Professor Donna Waters from Sydney Nursing School.

“We found that emergency nurses demonstrated significantly higher levels of openness to experience, agreeableness and extroversion personality domains compared to the normal population. Emergency departments (EDs) are a highly stressful environment – busy, noisy, and with high patient turnover. It is the entry point for approximately 40 percent of all hospital admissions, and the frequency and type of presentations is unpredictable.

“Emergency nurses must have the capacity to care for the full spectrum of physical, psychological and social health problems within their community and be able to develop a rapport with individuals from all age groups and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, in time-critical situations and often at a time when these individuals are at their most vulnerable. “For these reasons, ED staff experience high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, so it’s understandable that it takes a certain personality type to function in this working environment.”

But how will this research impact emergency care nursing and nurses? Belinda says that with ever-increasing demands on emergency services, it is necessary to consider how to enhance the recruitment and retention of emergency nurses in public hospitals.

“Assessment of personality and knowledge of its influence on specialty selection may assist in improving [recruitment and retention],” she says. The retention of emergency nurses not only has potential economic advantages, but also a likely positive impact on patient care and outcomes, as well as improved morale among the nursing workforce.”
ENORMOUS INTEREST IN GRADUATE NURSE TRANSITION PROGRAM

Australia’s first primary health care transition program for nursing graduates has experienced a huge demand for places in its 2015 program.

There are major changes happening to health care delivery in Australia. As hospital resources are stretched, care is increasingly shifting to community-based settings. The number of people with complex chronic diseases being cared for in the community is rapidly increasing, and there are not enough specialist nurses to meet the demand.

In response, Sydney Nursing School, in collaboration with Northern Sydney Medicare Local, has developed the first primary health care transition program in Australia, designed to help new nursing graduates move directly into the specialty.

The program provides robust training and support to new nursing graduates in the first 12 months of their careers – a crucial period in the development and retention of skilled graduates. It involves a full orientation program, study days, two placements at general practices (GPs), and structured learning blocks provided by Sydney Nursing School, with support from key national primary health care experts. Registered nurses at the GPs involved will receive training to provide mentoring support for the new graduate nurses.

“Transition programs have been around in the acute care setting for some time and research has shown that they help attract and retain highly skilled, specialist staff,” says Dr Christina Aggar, Project Investigator and Course Coordinator of Sydney Nursing School’s new Master of Primary Health Care Nursing.

“This program has been designed to specifically address the shortage of skilled primary health care nurses. The interest from GPs to partner with us and students to get involved has been phenomenal.”

To find out more about the program or Sydney Nursing School’s new Master of Primary Health Care Nursing – designed specifically for community-based nurses to develop their advanced nursing practice skills, leadership potential and research – contact Christina Aggar at christina.aggar@sydney.edu.au.

STUDENT LEADERS – MAKING HEARTS BEAT AGAIN

In Australia the chances of surviving a cardiac arrest that happens outside of hospital are a shocking nine percent.

So when Master of Nursing student Janelle White helped form Take Heart Australia, she decided action was needed if the national not-for-profit organisation was to achieve its vision of increasing the survival rate to 50 percent within five years.

With that in mind, Janelle and the team from Take Heart Australia organised a launch day at Luna Park in May. During the event, more than 1000 people were trained to save lives using high-quality CPR and automated external defibrillators (AEDs). The event was delivered in collaboration with 21 different emergency services and first aid providers including fire, police and ambulance services, surf life saving, royal life saving and St John’s ambulance.

Janelle was supported in her leadership efforts by 50 of her peers from Sydney Nursing School. As the only nursing school representing the profession on the day, Dean, Jill White, along with academic staff also attended.

Interwoven in the students’ curriculum, this practical day taught students and other frontline health professionals the five key components of high-quality CPR and safe operation of an AED. The skills acquired by student nurses were supplemented with further learning in the clinical simulation units back at the Mallett Street Campus.

Take Heart Australia is a new national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving survival from cardiac arrest. For more information, visit its website at www.takeheartaustralia.com.au
RESEARCH GRANT SUCCESS

Congratulations to Associate Professor Yun-Hee Jeon, who has recently received $105,120 from the Primary Dementia Collaborative Research Centre – Assessment and Better Care, for research titled ‘Community aging in place: advancing better living for elders with cognitive impairment’.

Yun-Hee, as the lead investigator, will collaborate with researchers from Johns Hopkins University in the United States and the University of New South Wales, as well as researchers within the University of Sydney.

Yun-Hee will also join a team conducting the first Australian study to count the number of people with dementia who live alone, or a couple if both have dementia.

KIT PACKING DAY – JOIN US!

We invite you to join us for Sydney Nursing School’s annual health kit packing day. The event will be held on Thursday 4 December 2014, from 9.30am to 1pm, in the Great Hall on the Camperdown Campus.

This year we are supporting the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, with the aim of improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We ask that you lend a hand and your time to assemble kits containing basic health items, which will be distributed to Aboriginal children across rural Australia. The kits will help to demystify health services and make health care a little more fun and less intimidating. Access to health services is a key issue for Aboriginal communities in rural and remote Australia. The health kits are designed to encourage families to access health services and complete routine vaccinations and children’s health checks.

Be a part of this wonderful day – it’s a little thing that will make a big difference.

You can register online at alumni.sydney.edu.au/packingday2014

FACULTY LECTURER WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

Congratulations to Toby Raeburn, a part-time lecturer at Sydney Nursing School, who recently received the Mental Health Nurse Achievement Award from the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

Toby, who is also founder of ROAM Communities Mental Health Nursing, said: “Mental health nurses make wonderful contributions to improving the social and emotional wellbeing of vulnerable populations all over the world every day of the week, so it is very humbling and a great honour to receive this award.”

Sydney Nursing School offers a master’s degree, graduate diploma and graduate certificate in mental health nursing, which can help registered nurses to meet criteria necessary for recognition as a mental health nurse by the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

Sydney Nursing School offers a Master of Mental Health Nursing. For more information, visit sydney.edu.au/nursing/pg

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