

**International Nurses Day Profile
Helen Sawyers - WCDHB**



Helen attends to a patient at Buller Hospital

64-year old Helen Sawyers has been looking after people in Buller for more than 40 years. As a registered nurse in the Foote Ward at Buller's rural hospital she has seen it all.

Today, on International Nurses Day, she reflects on her career in the rural west coast region.

"I started my training in 1967, at Buller hospital.

"We were the last class to undertake all training onsite because after that classes needed to complete their surgical component at base hospital due to our theatre closing."

She has fond memories of her training and first experiences.

"The highlights of my training included the ongoing pranks of living in the nurse's home with all the rules we constantly broke! I quickly learnt to avoid the senior nurses who would boss us around and remind us of their authority."

Things have certainly changed.

"We are so now well supported by management.

"It is a collegial working environment where we are supported to continue to study and mentor.

“I work in a very close team of medical and nursing staff and we are able to work through challenging experiences, being able to discuss what went wrong and what went well and learn from this.”

Helen has worked in all areas at Buller, from maternity, aged care and medical, prior to her full-time current position, rotating shifts mostly as Duty Nurse Coordinator in acute admitting ward. After hours she is responsible for medical long stay ward with 16 inpatients and a palliative care bed, situated close to the ward. Across the road is a residential home with 27 residents.

As a rural hospital, the ward and the nursing staff are prepared for many varied conditions across eight medical beds for in-patients, often liaising with the Rural Medical Officer at base hospital which is an hour and half drive by car. There is a GP on call to cover triage 1 and 2 patients – the most critical.

“It’s not dissimilar to when I started – with the care changing from day to day. But the technology and expectations have changed. As students we were often called back for special sick patients. Back then we used the Bird respirator and oxygen tent for children with cystic fibrosis, but nowadays they would be sent to Intensive Care unit.”

Helen took a break from nursing of approximately 10 years to have three children and spend time with them before going back to work nursing part-time and then full time.

When not nursing, she is involved with family and grandchildren.

“With another three stepchildren, I have 13 grandchildren. At one stage 5 out of 6 children lived in Australia, so we’ve travelled a lot!”

“I enjoy gardening, we have a big section and I also enjoy sewing when I can find the time!”

Helen is also passionate about ongoing education in the profession.

“I have achieved nurses competencies, am a Nursing Council approved assessor, ward delegate and chair for Regional council and in 2012 I applied for post grad equivalency, and this was successful allowing me to submit my portfolio at Expert level”.

Helen is also involved in the Professional Development and Recognition Programmes, and is currently an assessor for portfolios, Nurse Entry to Practice programme (NETP) and a preceptor – a professional mentor.

“I preceptored a first NETP student in our ward. It was great to have a young enthusiastic person in our work area, who brought fresh ideas and best practice.

“Along with our guidance and experience she completed her year with us and went on to follow her passion for working in theatre in another DHB. Last year she completed her masters’ dissertation.

“But wouldn’t you know, she returned one day to visit and told me she would like to return to us - she misses rural nursing!”

“I’m enjoying a fantastic career that is very rewarding, often challenging but so worthwhile. AS I have seen in my own career and in mentoring others, there are many areas nurses can practice in today, as they continue to for fulfil their ambitions and continue to learning and contribute.”

Today on May 12 it is International Nurses Day. Take a moment to think about the significant contribution Helen and other nurses like her make to our and our loved ones’ lives, and to thank them.

If you are interested in joining the profession, up skilling or finding resources contact the South Island Alliance Regional Training Hub [here](#).

About the South Island Alliance regional training hub (SIRTH):

The South Island Alliance, made up of the five DHBs, supports the contribution nurses make and promotes and co-ordinates professional development and attracting people to the workforce. It does so via the South Island Regional Training Hub (SIRTH), one of four innovative health networks in NZ working with Health Workforce NZ.

The networks developed by SIRTH will enable sharing of innovations and emerging ideas throughout the region, towards building a strong health workforce and higher quality care for patients.

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