

Passion for Aged Care lasts the Test of Time

Elizabeth Langer's career spans nearly five decades and two continents, most of it working with elderly patients in aged care. Her desire to support the elderly is as strong today as when she became a nurse in the 60s.

"I am still very passionate about caring for the elderly and about what we can do as a profession to improve the quality of life of aged-people," says Liz, a Nurse Practitioner (NP) at Southern District Health Board.

"Working with the elderly is so rewarding; older people appreciate everything we do to help them in their end of life journey."

Liz's career began with a nursing diploma from St Mary's Hospital in Madison Wisconsin, USA in 1966. Her first job was in cardiac intensive care, but it wasn't long before she moved into aged care, working at the Wisconsin Veterans Home, a 750-bed facility for aging veterans and their spouses.

There she remained for the next 31 years, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing from Alverno College, Milwaukee, and a Masters Degree in Nursing as a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner from the University of Wisconsin, and becoming a Nurse Practitioner.

After 17 years (from 1986 until 2003) as NP, my husband and I decided it was time for change, and moved from Wisconsin to Dunedin, where her nursing career continued and where she enjoys walking with her spouse George and their beagle, Spike, also known as "the Beast of Pine Hill"!

After obtaining her NZ Nurse Practitioner status, she started working with Mental Health Services for Older People as a Nurse Practitioner, and continues there today attending to needs of clients and residents with dementia and other related health problems in rest homes, hospitals as well as in their own homes.

According to Liz, deciding to become an NP was an important turning point in her career.

"It gave me great flexibility and autonomy in my role and allows me to be an even more skilled practitioner in caring for the elderly including independent management of their medication needs."

"Nursing as a whole allows much flexibility; there are many types of work and work hours can be flexible in many instances which benefits nurses who are also parenting. It's a wonderful profession because as we nurse we help people when they need it most.

But she also sees challenges in the sector.

"One of the big issues I see is the aging work force in nursing, with over half of the practising nurses over the age of 45.

On May 12 it is International Nurses Day. Take a moment to think about the significant contribution Liz and others like her make to our and our loved ones' lives, and to thank them.

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 underway throughout the region, so that we have a strong health workforce and higher quality care for patients.

If you are interested in joining the profession, up skilling or finding resources In the South Island, contact the South Island Alliance Regional Training Hub.