

## Media Release

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# Australia's top nurses named in 2011 HESTA Awards

A nurse who has spent the past four years working with homeless people on the streets of Sydney has been named Nurse of the Year in the 2011 HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Paul Esplin was honoured for his work and advocacy on behalf of Sydney's rough sleepers. Many are living with severe mental illness, developmental delay and drug and alcohol addiction.

As The Michael Project Nurse for Medibeat, a program run by Mission Australia in partnership with the St Vincent's Hospital Homeless Health Service, Mr Esplin works with clients on the street, in laneways, parks, drop-in centres and crisis accommodation.

He checks clients' health and ensures their basic needs are met, as well as arranging medical appointments and referrals, and dealing with guardianship and court matters.

"This sector is a pressure cooker. There are finite resources and huge needs. We have to remember equal access to services is a social justice issue," Mr Esplin said.

"Some of our clients have been homeless for 30 or 40 years. They have very complex needs and organisations don't always know what to do with them. These clients don't have the right forms or fit into services' criteria. Some are illiterate, often without a valid Medicare card, and they need a lot of help to get through this to reach a better, healthier, place in their lives."

Mr Esplin was presented with \$10,000 in travel and education grants in front of hundreds of his professional peers at a gala awards ceremony in Melbourne. The ceremony was held on the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birthday,

The Graduate Nurse of the Year Award went to Zena Coffey from Austin Health in Victoria. Ms Coffey was honoured for her commitment to education, holistic care and effective communication, including using cue cards and alphabet charts to understand patients who are unable to speak.

"Working in palliative care is confronting, difficult and rewarding at the same time," Ms Coffey said.

"I am fascinated by the way in which nursing has evolved, and want to be a part of taking nursing to the next level."

Ms Coffey received \$5,000 in travel and education grants to assist with her Honours studies.

The Geriatric Flying Squad, from War Memorial Hospital in NSW, won the \$10,000 Innovation in Nursing Award. It is a rapid-response, nursing service for elderly patients struggling in their homes.

Clinical Nurse Consultant Amanda Klahr manages the program, which provides comprehensive geriatric assessments, multidisciplinary care in the home and referrals to appropriate services.

"Our clients are community-dwelling elders who are failing at home for some reason. They are referred to us by a concerned GP, neighbour, carer or family member," Ms Klahr said.

"The Geriatric Flying Squad is a rapid response service. The nurses triage the clients by researching medical records and talking to family or GPs and we are in the house in 2-3 days."

ME Bank, which has supported the awards since 2008, funded the \$25,000 prize pool.

Congratulating the winners, HESTA CEO Anne-Marie Corboy said more than 480 nominations had been received this year and the calibre was exceptional.

"The HESTA Australian Nursing Awards highlight three extraordinary nurses but they are also a tribute to the many thousands of nurses engaged in lifesaving work every day," Ms Corboy said.

For information visit [hestanursingawards.com](http://hestanursingawards.com)

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