

Media Release
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Geriatric Flying Squad wins Innovation in Nursing Award

A rapid-response nursing service for older people struggling in their homes has won the Innovation in Nursing category of the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

The Geriatric Flying Squad was developed at the War Memorial Hospital in NSW with an unusual philosophy – to do whatever it takes and never say “we can’t help”.

Clinical Nurse Consultant Amanda Klahr manages the program, which provides comprehensive geriatric assessments, multidisciplinary care in the home, and referrals to appropriate services. The team includes a clinical nurse specialist, a doctor specialising in geriatric care, a social worker, occupational therapist, physiotherapist and clinical psychologist.

“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 for sub-acute patients. The nurses triage the clients by researching their medical records and talking to family or the GP and we are in the house in two to three days.”

The aim of the service is to assist clients to continue to live in their own homes and to maximise their quality of life. A key benefit is the reduction in presentations to emergency departments for older people.

“Emergency departments are not the ideal environments for older people,” Ms Klahr said.

“I like to think we rescue at least one older person a week by helping to eliminate unnecessary trips to the emergency department and in turn enabling emergency departments to continue delivering immediate and acute care to the broader community.”

If a patient needs hospital care, the team can organise direct admission into War Memorial Hospital for rehabilitation or two major local hospitals.

Established with funding from the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), what sets the program apart is its use of laptop technology to offer a flexible, paperless mobile service.

“No two patients follow the same pathway of care. Our criteria are very flexible, which means we are very broad in what we see and can treat,” Ms Klahr said.

“It’s about fitting the service to the client’s needs. If I go to a client’s house and they need a bath – I give them a bath. Whether it’s a cognitive assessment, a leg ulcer, a complicated family situation or transport to a medical appointment, I can do it.”

The squad typically works with a client for 12-15 weeks – including an intensive first month – before discharge. If the client encounters difficulties again, they can always return to the service.

The Geriatric Flying Squad won a \$10,000 grant to develop its innovative service. The prize was announced at a gala ceremony in Melbourne on the anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birthday.

The \$10,000 HESTA Australian Nurse of the Year prize went to Sydney’s Paul Esplin from St Vincent’s Hospital Homeless Health Service and Mission Australia. The \$5,000 Graduate Nurse of the Year Award went to Zena Coffey from Austin Health in Victoria.

HESTA CEO Anne-Marie Corboy congratulated all the 2011 winners and thanked the 480 people who made a nomination this year. ME Bank donated the \$25,000 total prize pool.

For information visit hestanursingawards.com

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