

Media Release
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Nurse to Perth's homeless honoured

A nurse working with homeless and transient clients on the streets of Perth has been named a finalist in the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Louise Orme was nominated for her work with Perth Primary Care Network's Street Doctor program, a GP clinic on wheels that takes healthcare services to the streets.

Mrs Orme's nomination stood out because it came from a client undergoing treatment for mental illness. The client wrote the award application herself and secretly arranged for Mrs Orme's Street Doctor colleague to second the nomination.

"I feel like a winner already. I know what a great effort it was for that person to nominate me, the trouble they went to, despite their own health problems, and I am blown away. My feet haven't touched the ground," Mrs Orme said.

The moving nomination statement credited Mrs Orme with saving the client's life by staying back late at the Street Doctor van one night to talk.

"I knew there were times when that person needed support and I did what any nurse would do. I'm not extraordinary. I'm not groundbreaking. I never knew I made such a difference," Mrs Orme said.

Originally from England, Mrs Orme moved to Australia six years ago. After working in prison healthcare and accident and emergency care, she joined Perth Primary Care Network's Street Doctor to help people who were disadvantaged and marginalised by society.

"I used to think homeless people were all alcoholic older men. When I started this job I realised there are so many people out there who have no family, no support and no safe place to go. A small mistake, a little thing, can see people end up on the street," Mrs Orme said.

"We see lots of mental health clients living on the streets. Others live in backpacker hostels while they wait for proper accommodation. Having no fixed address is a huge problem."

Mrs Orme does a mix of day and night shifts with the Street Doctor service, which parks at a variety of city locations, including soup kitchens. Advocacy is a huge part of her role - writing letters, calling other service providers and arranging referrals for clients.

"I work with an amazing team of doctors and outreach workers to offer medical treatment that is free, accessible and confidential. Often we see 30 people at the van a night but only five see the doctor, so people come for the social support as well as medical care."

Ms Orme is one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Nurse of the Year will win \$10,000 in education and travel grants. Other awards are: Innovation in Nursing with a \$10,000 grant to develop their service or program and the Graduate Nurse of the Year who will benefit from \$5,000 in education and travel grants. The prize money is provided by ME Bank, a supporter of the awards since 2008.

The winners will be announced at a gala awards ceremony in Melbourne on Florence Nightingale's birthday - 12 May. Interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne for the event at Crown Entertainment Complex.

HESTA is one of Australia's largest superannuation funds with more than 700,000 members. It is chosen by more people working in health and community services than any other fund.

Visit hestanursingawards.com to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

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