

Media Release
20 April 2011

Flood evacuation nurse honoured in national awards

A Director of Nursing, forced to evacuate a remote aged-care facility twice during floods in Queensland, is in the running for an award in the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Churches of Christ nurse Rebecca Burgess had only been in her job for seven weeks when the tiny township of St George faced inundation.

In March 2010, Ms Burgess had only two days to arrange an evacuation plan for 35 residents. Working with the local council disaster team, some clients were moved to the local hospital, on higher ground, while remaining residents were airlifted to Brisbane.

Packing clothes and medication, photocopying care plans, ensuring residents were clearly identified and advising residents' families was just part of the job.

"During the first evacuation we spent hours on the tarmac waiting for the plane and we were worried the airstrip would be cut off," said Ms Burgess.

"The important thing was just to remain calm and in control to reduce residents' anxiety. It was my job to ensure the residents were not fearful."

The evacuation was repeated in January 2011, as the Balonne River again threatened the town.

"For the second evacuation we were loading residents on to Lear jets every three hours from 10 at night. The last group flew out to Brisbane around eight in the morning. I was left to watch the facility, lift up the furniture and feed the animals."

Although the incidents were difficult, Ms Burgess looks back on them with affection.

"I was an outsider from Scarborough, north-east of Brisbane, when I took the job. I think people were hesitant about how I would go. I feel like I belong now. After coping with two evacuations, I think people know they can trust me," she said.

Residents were evacuated for a week the first time and almost four weeks on the second inundation. Water reached the front entrance of one building, marooning it through two flood peaks, but the facility did not flood.

Ms Burgess 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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