

What we do and why we do it Tim Emerton- Nurse Practitioner

I started my career as a medical clerk in the RAAF. I then became an EN then RN and finally a Nurse Practitioner in Alcohol and Other Drugs.

People often state that must be a stressful job. I reply that it's a really fascinating job and although it can have its stressful moments, it is not on the whole a stressful job once you understand it not your job to "fix" people but to help facilitate their recovery.

My job involves withdrawal management from a range of drugs and stabilisation on Opiate Replacement Therapy for those that this route is most applicable. This involves assessment, ordering blood tests, prescribing, monitoring and referral to meet other needs such as psychiatric, housing, counselling and other appropriate services.

I did not start out to be an Alcohol and Other Drugs practitioner however opportunities kept presenting and I found I really enjoyed this area of work. What kept it interesting are people journeys from dependence to recovery. They come from all walks of life. During my time I have worked with Actors, Musicians, University Professors, Bikies, ex-Olympians, Accountants and the homeless to name a few. They all have diverse stories about how drugs came into their lives and how it has impacted on them.

Our area of expertise is still in its infancy and new research is being conducted all the time. I think we still have a long way to go to fully understand dependence and develop better treatments for our clients. Stigma is still a huge issue for our clients and political ideology has been a barrier to changing this. Thankfully progress is slowly being made in this area and the fact that medicinal Cannabis is now being introduced shows some of the gains made in this area.

Apart from being an interesting evolving area of nursing practice the other reason I continue in this field is seeing people recover. This might involve less time between treatments, abstinence or harm minimising the impacts from their drug use. It might just mean that they now have housing, less legal issues or the return of their children to their care. The small gains are often the most important as from "little things big things grow" as the song goes.

I look forward to going to work most days. Who can ask more than that.