

History of Nursing in the Alcohol and other Drug Sector in Australia.

When you search for “*nursing history in Australia*” there is a lot written. You will find headings that say: **Strength, Courage and Bravery! The History of Nursing in Australia!** And topics on **the Florence Nightingale Nurses**ⁱ. It is interesting to see how nursing has played a fundamental role in the development of health care in Australia, whilst the role of nurses appears to go unrecognised.

Looking at the documented timelines for nursing milestonesⁱⁱ progress can be identified from as far back as the mid 1800’s (and continues to be updated). Some of the milestones include:

- 1949: the formation of the NSW College of Nursing and Australian College of Nursing
- 1975: the improvement of the nurse education system, including the first nursing diploma program in Australia.
- 1983 the importance of human rights in nursing was made explicit in a statement adopted by the International Council of Nurses
- 1988 a nurse developed the first child-centered nursing model
- 1992 "Cultural Safety" was made a requirement for nursing and midwifery education programs by the Nursing Council of New Zealand and has been more recently adopted in Australia.

Trying to scope these milestones made me think about the contribution nurses have made and continue to make to the drug and alcohol sector. However, if you search for nursing history in the AOD sector, it is very difficult to establish a timeline or a history of drug and alcohol nursing in Australia, as there is very little documented.

We do know that in 1982, when the first group of hospital based drug and alcohol nurses came together to network, it became clear that nurses were working in different philosophies of care and involved in different treatment modalities. These nurses later went on to build DANA (then known as the Drug & Alcohol Nurses Association). These nurses worked predominantly in medicated detoxification services, a few methadone services and some hospital based consultation and liaison services. Services, at that time were isolated as there was tension in treatment philosophies and divergence in the way care was delivered. Today, the understanding of dependence, the role of services, training, experience and the landscape have all changed considerably. The role of the nurse in the provision of AOD treatment is now integral to care and encompasses all levels of practice from new graduates, to advanced levels of practice and has more recently extended to include AOD Nurse Practitioner roles.

DANA has established a project to document the history of nursing within the AOD sector across Australia and needs your help!

If you have stories to share of your experience or would be interested in being involved in an expert reference group for this project, please contact Kt Harvey at dana.mail2access@gmail.com

ⁱ Milestones in Australian Nursing: Australian Nursing College Journal 1999

ⁱⁱ The Australian Nursing and Midwifery History Project