



A quick chat with...

A relative latecomer to nursing, Cherie Whitbread talks comfy shoes and chili mud crab.
By Conor Burke

Which hospital do you work at and what do you do there?

My work encompasses research and direct client care for people with diabetes at Royal Darwin Hospital and the Menzies School of Health Research.

What is your educational background?

I started my nursing career in hospital-based programs at Toowoomba General Hospital [Qld] for general nursing and Gladesville Hospital [NSW] for psychiatric nursing. I was 30 years of age and a mother of two young children before I began tertiary studies, firstly a bachelor of nursing (post-registration), then a graduate certificate in diabetes education, followed by a master of public health and a master of health science (nurse practitioner).

Why did you choose this career path?

Being female and from a modest background in the early '80s, nursing and teaching were obvious choices. Nursing offered the opportunity to learn and work at the same time, and although I didn't know it then, it was this translation of theory into practical that fuelled my passion for this career pathway. I enjoy learning about the latest evidence and then working with other health professionals and clients and their families so that we can put it into practice.

Working in the Top End of the Northern Territory has also provided unique opportunities such as working with Aboriginal people and tackling the challenges associated with remoteness.

What does a typical day on the job look like for you?

It varies depending on the acuity levels of the hospital, so it means working with our team to juggle inpatient reviews and coordinating discharges in which remoteness adds a layer of complexity and outpatient clinics and reviews. Amidst this, we manage to have journal club, deliver health professional education and constantly try to improve our services.

What do you love about your job and what would you change?

I love contact with people – work colleagues, patients, their families – and the constant drive to improve the way we do business. I would definitely change our service facilities so that we could provide a place for our outpatients to have group learning and a more inviting environment.

What's the best footwear for a day on your feet?!

That's easy – sensible shoes. At the moment its Borelli shoes from one of our local footwear shops that has been here forever. Out of work its runners, thongs or high heels.

What advice would you give to nurses entering the profession?

Don't be in a rush to specialise. Experience as much as you can first. Create your own career path, be prepared to step out of your comfort zone, and seek out constructive and innovative leadership.

What is the next step for you in your nursing career?

I will be actively seeking a nurse practitioner position and focusing on providing nursing leadership, particularly in regards to enhancing models of care for people with diabetes.

What books are you reading at the moment?

I've just finished *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman and *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* by Sheryl Sandberg. My current read is *Live Lead Learn* by Gail Kelly.

What was your first concert? And what was your most recent?

My first adult concert was Australian Crawl at Cloudland in Brisbane in 1982, and my most recent concert was the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in December 2017.

What's the best holiday you've ever been on?

In 2016, I walked 370km of the Camino de Santiago trail in Spain. It was a fantastic experience – I thoroughly recommend it.

What's your ideal meal?

Fresh local produce cooked simply (chili mud crab is right up there) with a glass of super cold champagne and dessert (it is not an option) – oven-baked peaches, crème fraîche and pistachio nuts.

What's your ultimate day-off activity?

A morning run with friends, and when we are holidaying, body surfing before breakfast always sets up the day well. After that, nothing beats hanging out at home with my loved ones and our moody tabby cat! ☺

If you or any nurse you know would like to be profiled, please email: Conor.Burke@apned.com.au