

Historical beginnings

The development of Nursing Excellence – the 80's to the 90's. This article was written by Alison Pirret, Freda Holmes, Pat Turton and Cathie Williams.

The 1980's through to the 1990's was an exciting time for professional nursing and midwifery development at Middlemore. It was a time spent creating a professional nursing vision and then watching the vision become a reality.

The setting for Middlemore in the early 80's was one of too few nursing staff, heavy workloads, poor equipment, resources and an environment which in real estate terms would be captioned *"a handyman's dream, in need of tender loving care."*

Middlemore was often labelled the "poor cousin" when compared to the other two major hospitals in the Auckland Hospital Board area. The early 80's saw 138 beds closed and many unfilled nursing positions due to a chronic nursing shortage. The shortage of staff, poor equipment, resources and a less than pristine environment resulted in low nursing morale. However, in spite of low morale the 'spirit' of Middlemore remained.

The nursing shortage of the early 80's resulted in innovative thinking by Karen Poutasi, (former Medical Superintendent) and Cecilia Zandvoort, principal nurse, in methods to recruit staff. This included the development of specialist courses in a variety of nursing areas, free room and board, a one year bonding after registration for student nurses and the setting up of the child care facility.

Nursing staff also gained funding from the Health Department to run a recruitment programme, inviting nurses from the technical institutes around the country to come and experience Middlemore "first hand". The programme was most successful.

This vision of the early 80's was developed further in the latter part of the decade with the refocusing of nursing to patient-centred care, through excellence in nursing. Recognising the current hierarchal nursing system as a hindrance to this development, Lee Mathias, principal nurse and assistant principal nurses Cathie Williams, Gerard Lessen and Jo Maudsley challenged the traditional restrictive nursing pathways by separating the supervisor level into clinical and management pathways. The clinical restructuring saw the development of the nurse consultants, who were able to focus on professional and clinical nursing and nursing managers on operational systems.

Each speciality had a nurse consultant and where specialities were not represented in the previous system, nurses with the required expertise were recruited into the nurse consultant team.

The first meeting of the nurse consultants and nurse managers saw the "veterans" and the "new blood" summing each other up and wondering "how the heck was all this going to come together". But come together it did. This restructuring transformed nursing at Middlemore from crisis management to professional excellence. The new structure of nurse consultants enabled the cohesiveness of the previously separated nursing departments and the reality of the vision emerged.

Historical beginnings - continued

The vision continued to grow. Middlemore organised a number of conferences with well-known nursing leaders as guest speakers to help achieve the goal. These conferences were attended by Nurses from all over NZ and enabled Middlemore to share their professional developments with other nurses in the country. Nursing at Middlemore was being seen as innovative and a model for other hospitals to follow.

1988 saw the 'Levels of Practice' programme implemented. Professional nursing practice was supported by many of the innovative activities of the nurse managers. These included patient acuity and risk management systems, roster standards and the development of the special assignment team. This team functioned to meet the needs of the clinical areas in times of staff sickness and unexpected increases in patient acuity.

The goal of nursing to achieve nursing excellence continued to flourish through the development of area health boards and the implementation of service management. As a result of this professional nursing growth, the arrival of 1990's saw high nursing morale, refurbished wards, adequate equipment, resources and a full nursing complement, although full-time equivalents were still sub-optimal in some areas. Charge nurses were involved in budgets for the first time.

The 1980's to the 1990's saw immense personal and professional growth for nurses and midwives at Middlemore. The early 1990's was a time of interdepartmental cohesiveness and nursing collegiality. Nurses had achieved and gone beyond the vision and in the process had gained a strong sense of pride and loyalty to Middlemore Hospital. Middlemore was now seen as a leader in nursing practice and a model for other hospitals to follow.

It was at this time that nursing entered the era of Regional Health Authorities and Crown Health Enterprises.



The nurse consultants at Middlemore Hospital at Christmas 1992.

At the long table from the left are Catherine Logan, Joan Williams, Marilyn Crocker, Alison Pirret, Cathie Williams, Gill Wallace, Jessie Mravicich, Pat Turton, Trish Schoonderwoerd and Freda Holmes.