

15 July 2019

## Sydney's south west pioneering indigenous healthcare

Cheryl Porter is a pioneer in health, linking palliative care and honouring the indigenous culture.

The South Western Sydney Local Health District Senior Aboriginal Health Worker Palliative Care role was the first designated in the state. Proven successful, all other local health districts have been offered the same role and are now filling them.

"I saw the gap in palliative care for indigenous people and saw the job advertised; I just had to apply," Ms Porter said.

"It's important to know that no two Aboriginal people are the same. Broadly though, the whole concept of palliative care is not something we like to talk about; that's sorry business.

"My role is about providing support in palliative and end of life care that is person-centred in meeting the cultural, social, emotional and spiritual needs of Aboriginal people and their family.

"I love what I do and the people I meet. I feel so privileged to be part of this journey, all Aboriginal people should be able to complete their journey in a culturally appropriate way, at peace with their family and ancestors and with the best medical and cultural care."

Smoking ceremonies now occur in palliative care as a result of Ms Porter liaising with patients, their families and staff. She said the ceremony helps the spirit depart from this world and into the next "go back to country".

"It is important to acknowledge the history and sentiments of indigenous people coming to hospital. I do a lot of work with the patient and their family to make them feel safe."

Ms Porter has a nursing background and then transitioned to Aboriginal health, covering drug and alcohol and mental health in the state's most rural and remote communities. Seeing her great grandma in hospital inspired her to pursue a career in nursing.

District Area Palliative Care Manager Janeane Harlum said the District put forward the concept of a palliative care-specific Aboriginal Health Worker.

"Now that other local health districts have received funds to implement the same role, they are all reaching out asking for our advice and assistance," she said.

"What I love about this role is Cheryl is embedded in palliative care and she also works with the hospital's Aboriginal Liaison Officers, helping build the bridge with the chronic care team too."

The State Government has invested \$45 million over four years in palliative care for 100 palliative care nurses, Aboriginal health workers, digital health solutions and the refurbishment of existing facilities. This is in addition to a \$100 million package for palliative care that was announced as part of the 2017/18 Budget.