



Media Release
23 April 2012

Queensland cancer nurse in running for national award

Toowoomba oncology nurse Karen Barrett-McNeill is in the running for Nurse of the Year for her transformational management and patient care at Radiation Oncology Queensland (ROQ).

In less than 12 months as Nurse Unit Manager, Mrs Barrett-McNeill has revolutionised the nursing team and department, reviewing all care paths to ensure that no patient can slip through the cracks and miss an early intervention.

"We have electronic care path checklists to ensure we pick up the earliest signs on things like distress, mobility issues or skin reactions after radiotherapy," Mrs Barrett-McNeill said.

"The checklists also prompt us to provide information. People facing cancer treatment are going through such a stressful time. We try to be as supportive as we can, and letting them know what to expect makes their journey that much easier."

Mrs Barrett-McNeill revised the information given to each patient on their first day of treatment. Patients have strongly endorsed the new brochures, which provide enhanced information on each tumour stream to ensure patients have relevant information from the start of their care.

ROQ is a world leader in paperless systems for record management and the team's use of electronic medical records has been recognised nationally and overseas.

"In a computerised setting everything is far more efficient — there is no running around looking for lost forms, or rummaging through filing systems for patient records; it is all in one place," Mrs Barrett-McNeill said.

"The time we save can then be spent providing a greater level of care for the patients.

"It's also quick, easy and cost-effective to set up questionnaires that can be drawn on at any time from any point in the department to evaluate practices."

Electronic questionnaires now help monitor the patient's ongoing physical and emotional progress. They also act as a checklist for new and casual staff, ensuring they have all necessary information at their fingertips when providing care.

Mrs Barrett-McNeill is currently investigating how new resources, such as electronic tablets, can be used to better serve patients in regional areas.

"We provide care to patients from across the state and even into NSW. The benefit of a tablet is that we can keep track of the client through video calls that will also allow us to monitor the well-being of the patient without requiring them to travel," she said.

Mrs Barrett-McNeill is one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

The winners will be announced at a gala dinner in Melbourne on Thursday 10 May. Interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne for the event.

Nurse of the Year and Graduate Nurse of the Year will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. The Innovation in Nursing winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant to enhance or extend their project.

The prize money is provided by ME Bank, a supporter of the awards since 2008.

HESTA is one of Australia's largest superannuation funds with more than 730,000 members. It is chosen by more people working in health and community services than any other fund.

Visit hestaawards.com to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

Media enquiries: Michelle Edmunds (03) 9654 4799 / 0413 120 342