

HESTA Australian Nursing Awards
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Mansfield woman in running for Nurse of the Year

Compassion, professionalism and dedication to patient care in the toughest circumstances have led Kerry Brakels to the finals of the HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

The Mansfield District Hospital nurse is one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the national awards.

Mrs Brakels will travel to Melbourne for the gala awards ceremony on 10 May thanks to a powerful nomination from patient, Bill Thompson.

"It's just so unexpected and so beautiful. I can't believe he went to such lengths to say such a big thank you," Mrs Brakels said.

"When you work as a visiting nurse, especially in a palliative care role, you are with people in their darkest hour. Patients and their families are very appreciative and grateful but we are just doing what we are meant to do. That's our job. It's what we're here for."

Mrs Brakels, who manages the Visiting Nursing Service, said it was a privilege to be a guest in her patients' homes.

"We have a motto on the wall here: 'We may think we know what's best for a person's health but we are arrogant if we think we know what is best for a person's life'," she said.

"I never forget that I am a guest and I'm there to offer care and support, not tell people how to live."

Mrs Brakels first got to know Mr Thompson when she provided palliative care to his elderly mother. After his mother's death, Mr Thompson's own health deteriorated. In his nomination form, he described multiple occasions where Mrs Brakels dropped everything to provide urgent care as he made the long journey back to health.

"I just want people to know the work these nurses do in the community. They work for people who don't have much of a voice and I want people to recognise how valuable they are," Mr Thompson said.

Mrs Brakels said the role of a visiting nurse in a rural area was fantastic, varied and unpredictable.

"We do palliative care, wound care, hospital in the home, monitoring and support. It's about caring for patients where they feel most comfortable and giving them the support they need to stay at home. Many of our patients are quite isolated, so we help create support networks for them," she said.

Mrs Brakels is one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category. The winner will be announced at a gala dinner on 10 May at the Crown Entertainment Complex.

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.

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