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Victorian drug and alcohol nurse a finalist in national nursing awards

An alcohol and drugs withdrawal nurse in the Victorian town of Castlemaine has been named one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the 2013 HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Ms Janet Lees, of the Castlemaine District Health Service, has been recognised for her outreach work with marginalised and vulnerable clients who have been misusing substances and who often have no other link to the health profession.

The Nurse of the Year Award recognises a nurse, midwife, personal care attendant or assistant in nursing in Australia who has made an exceptional contribution to improving patient care, delivered health care in challenging circumstances and shown advocacy on behalf of patients or the nursing profession.

Ms Lees has had numerous successes in improving her clients' health and wellbeing, helping them to withdraw from alcohol and drugs, find accommodation and connect with other counselling.

"My work is important in ensuring people get the help they need. They are often in poor physical health, homeless, experiencing mental health issues, have low literacy, and high levels of family violence and incarceration," Ms Lees said.

"It may seem like a trivial thing, but when a client asks me 'how's your day been?', or says 'you look tired', that to me is the greatest indicator that they are turning their lives around.

"For them to think of someone else shows they are getting their lives back and I feel privileged to play a role in that, by offering a non-judgemental nursing service to our community."

Ms Lees and the other finalists will attend an awards dinner in Melbourne, where the winners will be announced on 9 May 2013.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards sponsor, ME Bank. The Nurse of the Year and Outstanding Graduate Award winners will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. The Team Innovation Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 750,000 members and \$22 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

Visit hestaawards.com.au for tickets to the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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