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Queensland mental health nurse a finalist in national nursing awards

A Caboolture mental health nurse, who has worked extensively with New Zealand Maori and Pacific Islanders, has been named one of five finalists in the Nurse of the Year category of the 2013 HESTA Australian Nursing Awards.

Ms Ria Akuhata, of Metro North Mental Health – Redcliffe/Caboolture, has been recognised as a finalist for 14 years of work as a registered nurse in mental health — particularly her work with new arrivals from the Pacific.

The Nurse of the Year Award recognises a nurse, midwife, personal care attendant or assistant in nursing 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 Akuhata has been involved in mental health care as the Recovery Programme Co-ordinator at Caboolture Hospital and as part of the BRITA Futures program, Building Resilience in Transcultural Australians.

The single mother of four worked in her spare time to develop cultural assessment tools, to help other mental health professionals in their work with young people experiencing mental health difficulties.

“Giving and being of service are an innate part of Maori culture and I try to carry that into my work as a mental health nurse. I know first-hand how hard it can be to arrive in Australia from another country, and to face obstacles and disadvantage,” Ms Akuhata said.

“Some of the young people I work with may be recovering from traumatic events, having suicidal thoughts and may even be in severe psychotic states. I try to ensure mental health professionals have a cultural understanding of these young people so they can offer the best care and compassion.”

Judges commended the nomination for making a significant contribution to the Queensland community.

Ms Akuhata and the other finalists will be flown to Melbourne to attend an awards dinner, 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 for the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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