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ACT anti-obesity nurse a finalist in national primary health awards

A primary health care nurse practitioner, leading the fight against obesity in a Canberra community, has been named a finalist in the 2013 HESTA Primary Health Care Awards.

Chris Helms — of West Belconnen Health Co-operative Ltd — has been recognised as one of four finalists in the Individual Distinction category for his work helping overweight clients at risk of heart disease, who would otherwise not be able to afford specialist dietitians or expensive gym memberships.

Mr Helms is a primary health care nurse practitioner with expertise in chronic disease management who screens, counsels and treats people at his clinic, to modify risk factors like smoking and lack of exercise.

The awards recognise the dedication and professionalism of those working in primary health care including physiotherapists, dentists, pharmacists, therapists, GPs, rehabilitation professionals, health educators and medical practice managers.

Mr Helms created a Lifestyle Modification Program that involves auditing the health of clinic clients and asking people at higher risk, with a high Body Mass Index, to take part in a 12-week turnaround program.

“We invited people to take part and the response was overwhelming. We followed up with personalised screenings and then kept in touch with clients — using podcasts and a discussion board — so they could stay informed and motivated during the program,” Chris Helms said.

“It was also important to ensure people didn’t have to pay any out-of-pocket expenses, so there was no financial barrier to them getting to grips with their health issues. We’ve been able to harness a range of professionals, at a single location, to support and motivate people to improve their health.”

The judges commended the nomination for tackling common health concerns in an area of high socio-economic disadvantage, at no cost to clients, while providing care of the highest order.

Chris Helms and the other finalists will be flown to Melbourne for an awards dinner on 6 June 2013, when the winners will be revealed.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards sponsor, ME Bank. The Young Leader and the Individual Distinction Award winners will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. The Team Excellence Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant to put towards the implementation of their program or initiative.

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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