

Women in Focus



Anna Shepherd: bringing healthcare home

VERSION 2

By Women in Focus | Published 06/12/2011 4:57 PM



Anna Shepherd feels like she is always rattling the cage. In her role as CEO of Regal Health Services, she has raised the bar for community health by providing world class care at home. Anna has continued to innovate with industry leading programs and collaborating with Sydney University. Both Tony Abbott and the Dean of Harvard Business School have written testimonials for Anna, who was a Finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards NSW 2011.

What keeps you motivated to be of service to the community?

For nearly 30 years, I've been an advocate for Nurses – but I'm not a Nurse and I think that is unique. I am the daughter of a Nurse and I started by following in her footsteps, embracing her legacy. I am very passionate about the fact that Nurses are highly valuable; they are the strongest workforce in the healthcare profession. Being of service is what I find most fulfilling in my life, making the difference and setting high standards in health.

How does innovation play a part in community health?

We are focussing on being a 'healthcare' company; we provide clinical services in the community – in people's homes. I have structured my business as an 'emergency department' – my call centre is run like an emergency department and we triage into the community – which is a very different model to a private agency providing live-in carers.

What is a major change you have seen over the past 30 years?

I don't accept things on face value, so in 1994 I determined that the Home Healthcare sector needed to have the same accreditation as hospitals, I challenged the industry. My feeling is that community health should be held accountable to equal standards as hospitals – if not higher standards. So we were the first to be accredited by The Australian Council for Healthcare Standards nationally in 1994. It was really a business approach to nursing that

made me want to ensure we are regarded highly and that our patients benefit from that commitment.

What is the future for community health?

For me it's very much focussing on being a healthcare company, I'm standing firmly on being able to provide clinical services rather than simply personal care or domestic services. I am also looking at building the pipeline of expert Nurses coming through.

I am on an Advisory Board at Sydney University, working with the Faculty of Nursing to ensure the curriculum for nursing in the future has a focus on primary health care – that's care being delivered in the community.

The strategy for the Government and private health insurers is to ensure that people are cared for out of hospital because in-hospital care is a higher cost than healthcare delivered in the home. So, I am very involved in hospital avoidance strategies and post-operative care.

Can you share with us your experience at Harvard Business School?

I was proud to be accepted into a three-year Global Entrepreneur Program at Harvard Business School, which is designed to help entrepreneurs who typically run a family business to take your business to the next level. I was the only Australian woman to graduate in 2010; there were 16 women in the program out of 110 participants.

I spent a month each year living in America, where my colleagues embraced women in business! I would tell people what I was doing with my business and they were so energetic about my achievements, it was a real confidence boost.

I've really drawn on the support network of graduates for that positive feedback and to remind me that what I have achieved is extraordinary.

What qualities are necessary for great leadership?

You need to be able to elicit leadership in the people around you. You need to engage the people around you and inspire those people to want to be better.

I graduated from Harvard but that didn't make me a leader – if I hadn't been a leader when I walked in three years before I don't think the course would have made me a leader. I think my leadership is a legacy handed down from my innovative mother who always inspired me to never ever give up and always believe in myself.

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20,000 jobs – know any Nurses?

VERSION 1

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The life expectancy of Australians is among the highest in the world. Between now and 2050, the number of people in the population aged 85 and over is expected to quadruple to 1.8 million*. While this poses many economic challenges, one of the ongoing challenges facing the Australian Nursing industry is finding aged care Nurses.

Hitting the headlines

Sift through the many headlines recently about aged care and they all say the same thing: *Nurse shortage taking its toll, Employment vacancies hit home, and Workforce shortage to worsen as retirees leave key roles.*

According to the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF), Australia continues to suffer a massive shortfall in nursing and midwifery staff right across public and private hospitals, residential aged care facilities and mental health facilities. In aged care alone, an extra 20,000 Nurses are urgently required to cope with a rapidly ageing population.

Filling the gap

ANF Assistant Federal Secretary, Yvonne Chaperon, said the increased use of temporary 457 work visas to bring in workers from overseas to fill the local labour shortfall is a "band-aid solution".

"What is really needed is an increase in the number of funded places for undergraduate nursing and midwifery courses, so Australia can meet the immediate and future needs of the health workforce, particularly in regional areas."

Community care

Anna Shepherd, CEO of Regal Health Services has developed a relationship with Sydney University to help grow the pipeline of Nurses coming into community health – where clinical services are provided at home.

“More than 50% of our Nurses have been with us for over 15 years but finding Nurses is a challenge. With Sydney University, we do clinical placements so in the student’s final year they get to see what it’s like to be a Community Nurse and this helps their transition into the workplace.”

Anna says the shortage in Nurses is one of her biggest challenges and by adopting a Home Healthcare strategy the health industry could save a lot of money in hospital avoidance and post operative care.

“Having Nurses, Physios, OTs and Clinicians working in the community saves the health industry a lot of money. Hospital standards can be achieved at home, but there is just a lack of awareness about how to do it. Home Healthcare also helps avoid social isolation in the community which is a growing problem with an ageing population.”

For more information about working with Regal Health Services, [click here](#).

Further information

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*Australian Government, Intergenerational Report, 2010

Sydney Morning Herald, Workforce shortage to worsen as retirees leave key roles, November 08, 2011

ABC News, Nurse shortage taking its toll, August 29, 2011

The Geelong Advertiser, Employment vacancies predicted as skills shortage hits home, November 15, 2011