



Nursing stalwart honoured with CHA's highest honour

28 August 2018

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) has celebrated the extraordinary dedication of Catherine (Kate) Birrell OAM whose selfless dedication to nursing and caring for others has earned a rightful place in perpetuity on the esteemed honour roll of CHA's Sr Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award.

At CHA's National Conference Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony in Melbourne, tribute was paid to Kate whose born days have been spent nursing, educating nurses and innovating the nursing profession.

CHA's Chief Executive Suzanne Greenwood said every past recipient of this award has been a woman religious or a member of the clergy, but this evening, we break from tradition.

"The person we wish to honour is not a member of the clergy and is not a sister. Tonight's winner is a woman of great achievements. She is a nurse by profession and has been a member of the Australian College of Nursing since 2012 and before that the Royal College of Nursing Australia from 1990."

"Her impact and influence upon all nurses in the Catholic Health Australia membership has been profound – she was pivotal in helping establish the CHA Nurse Unit Manager Scholarship Program, she initiated the CHA Nursing and Midwifery Symposium – which is now an annual event, and she initiated the CHA Nursing Awards.

Kate was a Board Member of Catholic Health Australia from 2009 to 2014, and during this time she was the Chair of the CHA Directors of Nursing and Midwifery Committee."

Kate made history becoming the first lay Director of Nursing at St John of God Geelong Hospital appointed in 1990, succeeding the Sisters of St John of God, was and appointed as the first Group-wide Chief Nursing Officer for St John of God Health Care in 2003.

In 2006, she was appointed by the Australian Catholic University to the position of Clinical Associate Professor of Nursing and at the end of 2014, after 35 years of service, she retired as Group Director of Nursing for St John of God Health Care.

Kate holds a number of health related degrees, as well as a degree in business and administration, has been a member of Barwon Health Ethics Committee, a member of the Mercy Health Board Quality Committee, and a member the Caroline Chisolm Ethics Centre Board.

She was awarded an Order of Australia medal (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday honours in recognition for her service to nursing, particularly education, and to the community, in 2015. She returned to St John of God Health Care providing consulting services as a Nursing Development Program Advisor to the Social Outreach International Health team – playing a key role in nursing capacity building in Timor-Leste. And again, this was of support to CHA, as CHA was a member of the Catholic Alliance for International Development, with partners ACU, Caritas & Catholic Religious Australia, which had a focus on Timor-Leste.

"...But clearly she did not have enough to do in retirement ... and so we appointed her as a Director of Calvary Ministries," Ms Greenwood joked.



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“Tonight we celebrate someone who has made a significant contribution not only across St John of God Health Care and Calvary Ministries, but for all CHA members. She exemplifies the great that occurs when we work together in our ministry, and she has inspired and mentored numerous others.”

“Her sustained commitment to teaching has contributed immeasurably to the strong Catholic leadership our health and aged care organisations are privileged to have today.”

ENDS

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