

MENTAL HEALTH NURSE'S TIRELESS WORK HONoured

THELMA Eather's contribution to improving mental health was nationally recognised when the nurse was awarded Mental Health Nurse of the Year.

Ms Eather has worked in her field for more than 25 years and has extensive nursing experience not just in mental health but also in maternity, medical wards, surgical and rural areas.

At present she is the director and nursing facility manager at the Rehabilitation Unit in Charters Towers and said she strives to promote health, not extinguish it.

She said on International Nurses Day, each health service has a special celebration by acknowledging nurses who have been proactive and passionate about their role.

"When we look at mental illness, one in every four people have anxiety or depression and people sometimes find that difficult to comprehend," Ms Eather said.

"I always think if someone had a heart attack at 27, their whole family would be involved, and the saddest thing for me in mental health is that if someone gets admitted to the acute mental health unit, because they had a psychotic episode, people are reluctant to visit them."

"Yet if they were in the cardiac ward or orthopedic

ward they would get flowers and visitors, so it's that whole stigma around mental health," she said.

Despite this, within the past 20 years she has been involved in mental health, and said within the last 15 years awareness of the situation and support for mental health has accelerated quickly. Those changes have been in the way services are delivered, particularly the deinstitutionalisation — as many people were locked up if they were eccentric.

"When I educate people, I explain to them they can be genetically predisposed to it, just like breast cancer you can be genetically predisposed, if you know you have that in your family, you have to be mindful of your own," she said.

"For mental health in the future, I would like to see people accept it. I would like to see a decrease in suicide, which is the unfortunate part about mental health, they know that 97 per cent of people who commit suicide are affected by mental health issues.

She said statistically there are more young males aged between 17-25, that commit suicide then are killed on our roads.

Ms Eather said those suicides impact on communities and it's all about intervention and prevention.



Thelma Eather from Charters Towers Rehabilitation Unit was awarded Mental Health Nurse of the Year.
Picture: SOPHIE KESTEVEN

"If we start with young people, their brain is like a sponge, and anything they have which is not natural will affect it," she said.

"It's about talking about your brain, just like your heart

and kidneys and learning how to look after it.

"I am passionate about promoting health and mental health is just another component of our health and building that resilience in our

community is really important."

— SOPHIE KESTEVEN
To talk to someone about depression or anxiety call Beyond Blue — 1300 224 643

in brief

Woman on theft and drug charges

A 35-YEAR-OLD woman has been charged with several theft and drug related offences. Police executed a search warrant on a Charters Towers residence on Saturday and found the woman in possession of stolen property and dangerous drugs. She will face Charters Towers Magistrates Court at a later date.

Driver blows BAC reading of .054

AN alleged drink driver will face Charters Towers Magistrates Court after being charged by police on Sunday. Police intercepted the 24-year-old man driving a Toyota Landcruiser on Pyrites Road at 7.30pm and he returned a positive breathe analysis reading. He was taken to Charters Towers Police Station where he allegedly recorded a blood alcohol concentration of .054 per cent.

Concerns over nursing home cost

A LOCAL seniors group has expressed concerns that asset-based accommodation charges for Eventide Nursing Home could leave the less fortunate elderly out in the cold.

Charters Towers 60 and Better coordinator Penney Wilson said there are concerns that wealthier patients will be admitted before those with little or no assets.

"Those who can pay will no doubt be prioritised above those who have no other option and haven't the financial wherewithal to pay their way," she said.

"This will cause some dissension within the community and against the home.

"In a small community like this where rumour is rife and news travels fast it is probably not a positive step for anyone."

Marlene Fielder is currently weighing up her options post retirement and is considering applying to go into Eventide.

Mrs Fielder said she is concerned about getting preference over others because her assets can meet the \$200,000 accommodation deposit.

"I'm in a four-bedroom home which is far too big and I'm waiting on knee replacements. If anything goes wrong I've got to think of my future," she said.

"I'd hate to think that because I

may have the funds to go there that I would be putting someone who is more needy out of their placement."

LNP Member for Thuringowa Sam Cox urged people to see the positives of an accommodation deposit for State-run nursing homes and insists no one will be left without care.

"It's important to note that this means tested by the federal government, so if someone doesn't have the ability and they can't afford anything they don't have to," Mr Cox said.

"I know some people will see this as a change in the wrong direction, but it's actually about changing it in the right direction.

"There will be people who have the

means to contribute and it is only fair that they do as others do across the state and across the country."

Mr Cox, who has a state-run nursing home in his electorate, said the interest on the accommodation deposits would go towards the maintenance of high level of service and high standard of accommodation.

Mrs Wilson said she expects staff will insist everyone will be taken care of, but she is not confident this will prove true. "I am sure staff will quote that they will meet the needs of the people, but they may not be given that opportunity when they have to be seen to be profitable to allow management to meet the costs of the upkeep

of the facility," she said of the state government decision.

"However it is not the staff at Eventide or the home itself that is the problem, it is the added expense and stress on families already under duress trying to look after failing family members."

Changes to the admission process come into effect on July 1.

Patients seeking a place at the state-run Eventide Nursing Home will be required to pay a minimum \$200,000 upfront refundable bond or will be charged a daily payment of \$45.41 as per an agreement reached with the aged care facility.

— SAM BIDEY

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