



Ballarat
District Nursing
& Healthcare

2011 | Our
Centenary Year

Thirty Years of Continuous Service

The Story of Frances Zala



Frances Zala is Ballarat District Nursing & Healthcare's longest serving employee. She has served a total of 34 years in the organisation, of which 30 have been continuous, from 1981 to the present time. Frances has been an integral part of the growth and development of BDNH and has witnessed enormous change in all aspects of the service.

Frances Jackson was born in Ballarat, attended Ballarat High School and when deciding what employment she would pursue, considered nursing would be her chosen career. She applied to undertake her general training at the Ballarat Base Hospital in 1970, continued on to do her midwifery in 1974, and although she enjoyed her work at the hospital, felt she would like to look at other opportunities that might be available for a newly graduated Sister.

Frances married her husband Brendan Zala in 1975, and one evening when talking to friends Laurel and Graeme Johnson, she mentioned that she would prefer to take a more personal approach to her nursing. Laurel, who was a weekend Sister with Ballarat District Nursing Society (as it was then named), suggested she might like to try district nursing and organised to take her out on the following Saturday. Frances loved the "hands on" approach and the close contact that was enjoyed with the clients. She approached Sr. Phyllis Dean, Director of Nursing and Manager of BDNS and became a permanent Holiday Reliever when the next vacancy occurred. There were eight District Nurses at this time.

Frances really enjoyed the challenges that were provided by district nursing and remained until 1979 when she and Brendan went overseas for an extended holiday. She obtained work at St. Mary's Hospital in London then journeyed to Holland and Switzerland, working along the way at various jobs including silver service waitressing and as a chambermaid. Brendan also enjoyed various positions with a variety of work while away.

They arrived back in Ballarat in 1981 and Frances returned to district nursing, realising the things she really enjoyed about her role was that she basically was her own boss, responsible for her clients and looked on as a family member by the patients whom she visited over longer periods. This provided excellent relationships and when she was promoted to the position of Deputy Director of Nursing, she was required to undertake administration duties as well as maintain her district nursing role.

Outside of the office, Frances had become a committee member of the Australian Council of Community Nurses – Victorian Branch and attended monthly meetings on a Saturday at the Royal District Nursing Service in Melbourne. Frances was also requested to be part of the Forms Review Committee set up by ACCN Victoria and these meetings were held of a weekend under the Chairmanship of Dr. Margaret Bennett. Their task was to review all the forms used within district nursing and to come up with a common set of forms that could be used across all district nursing services in

the state. This project was completed and a tool devised, which was implemented across all documentation in Victoria.



Sister Frances Zala with a very young patient

Some of the changes that have occurred during Frances' time at BDNS and later BDNH have been the changes to the role of a district nurse. In the early stages of employment, the position was task orientated with minimal paperwork. Commonly, the nurse would be the contact person between the client and doctor, and to do any follow up required with family and other health professionals.

In today's working environment the changes are significant with many other programs available, such as Hospital in the Home, which has created a much higher level of nursing. Infection control has improved over time and nurses are now able to provide more complex nursing procedures. Patients are generally living to a greater age and remain healthier with knowledge of exercise, diet and outside programs to increase their motivation to stay healthy and well.

Elderly people often wish to remain in their own home. Many have family living away from the area where they reside, and in some cases extended family live overseas. This makes the communication between the client, family and carers more difficult, and nurses are required to coordinate procedures.

It is very necessary for the nursing staff to keep up with changes and BDNH has a policy of education and supporting staff to increase their training in line with the expectations of the medical profession and the family of clients.



Frances with the new car and logo - 2006

Another change that Frances felt had an impact on clients is the higher demand for nurses as a result of the hospitals implementing a fast turnaround of patients. Some of the clients prefer follow up treatment in their own home, by choice, and require a lot of the support services that are now available. Ballarat is also becoming a desired destination for retirees who seek a less expensive and more secure lifestyle, to purchase homes in retirement villages in Ballarat. House prices are also far less expensive than alternate properties in Melbourne.

Ballarat is also a size to be community minded, with services being accessible without travelling a huge distance, and in most cases people interact with other members of the neighbourhood to ensure that somebody is looking to make sure they are healthy and mobile. Moving towards the end of one's life, the Ballarat Hospice Palliative Care organisation also provides an excellent service assisting the elderly who are suffering chronic illnesses by providing extended nursing service. Some of the services that improve the Ballarat lifestyle are Linkages, Meals on Wheels, visiting services from various charitable organisations, home handyman and others that can be sourced through the City of Ballarat or welfare agencies.

The ability of older people to remain in their own home was illustrated, Frances said, by two of her clients, brothers aged 96 and 97 years. Both have their own farm and they live separately but in close association with one another. They have lots of family support, and are encouraged to take advantage of services that will make their life easier. Their families live close by and the brothers are quite contented with their lifestyle, feeling quite secure and happy with their environment. They are aided by the

district nurses to ensure the security of living in their own home and maintaining their independence.

Frances also felt that the recently introduced Active Service Model is a great example of the way that district nursing has changed with the nurses being required to adopt an education role. When a client is discharged from hospital, the nurse implements the Active Service Model which is designed to enable the client to return to independent living. Importantly, they need to feel capable of performing the tasks that will ensure their independence. Some excellent outcomes have been achieved through educating clients and their desire to overcome some of the problems that they experience after an illness.

Also important to recognise is that most people, at this present time, are very well informed about what is available, and they have expectations that must be considered when looking at the holistic health of the client.

Frances Zala is an excellent example of the many staff at Ballarat District Nursing & Healthcare, who are dedicated to the concept of district nursing as a means of clients retaining their independence in the community. She believes that her role encourages people to undertake the responsibility of remaining in control of their lives and ensuring their independence for the future.

In 2006 Frances was honoured with a Life Membership of Ballarat District Nursing and Healthcare to recognise her 25 years of service. This was presented at the annual general meeting held in October that year. Both she and Brendan are pursuing a very healthy lifestyle which will enable them to continue to work for a few more years. They have also built a new home in Portarlington where they spend all their weekends.



Frances with the new Centenary logo on a BDNH car.