



Tête-à-Tête

Providing home support

Virginia Bullock is Managing Director of Home Support Services. Virginia developed Australia's first 'hospital in the home' program 20 years ago based on a firm belief that many patients don't need to be in hospital and would be better off receiving care in their own homes.

Business SA: Can you tell us about your career and how it led to Home Support Services?

Virginia: I was working as a young nurse in hospitals and thought there had to be another way. When I had to send my father to hospital to die from cancer rather than being cared for at home, I became determined to offer an alternative.

I started Home Support Service in 1988 from my lounge room with a small group of nurses, mostly friends. At the time, the concept of hospital avoidance through nursing in the home was untried and viewed as quite radical.

Now 20 years on we provide in-home health care support to thousands of South Australians each year, helping patients leave hospital safely with care or preventing them from being admitted to hospital in the first place.

Business SA: Could you outline the services that Home Support Services provides?

Virginia: Home Support Services provides in-home health care and support for more than 20,000 Australians each year in South Australia and Queensland.

Our services include in-home nursing and care, from wound and pain management through to palliative care and rehabilitation following surgery.

We run a series of programs designed to avoid hospital admittance and support early hospital discharges and offer community care of veterans and corporate vaccinations.

Business SA: How many people do you employ?

Virginia: Home Support Services employs 350 people in both South Australia and Queensland.

Our staff are passionate and dedicated health professionals, including registered nurses, personal carers, domestic assistants, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

Business SA: What is the most satisfying part of your job?

Virginia: Knowing that we are providing quality nursing care to people, in the comfort of their homes and surrounded by the people they love, is the most rewarding part of my job.

I am incredibly proud that Home Support Services helps thousands of patients leave hospital early and that our services are easing pressure on the State's health system by freeing up hospital beds.

It is extremely satisfying to see the benefits of in-home health care being recognised and accepted by health professionals, like GPs, specialists allied health providers, who refer patients to our care.

It is also a dream to work in a wonderful team environment with such committed and caring nurses and other health professionals.

Business SA: What have been the highlights of your career to date?

Virginia: Pioneering Australia's first 'hospital in the home' program has been the major highlight of my career. I know that patients are happy and our services are easing the strain on the hospital system by freeing up hospital beds.

A very recent highlight was being recognised at the 2009 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards for the central region, in the services category.

Working with passionate, like-minded and community-driven people, in both the public and private sectors, is a daily highlight.

In addition, I have found great reward in learning from the challenges along the way - that tenacity pays off, your vision is priceless, the right people make a real difference and no matter what, you should never give up.

Business SA: What major changes and trends are you experiencing within your industry?

Virginia: Growth of in-home health care is surging.

Government, health professionals and the wider community are recognising and accepting the benefits of health care in the home.

Demand for the type of service we provide will continue to rise in the future as healthcare professionals see that quality in-home health care plays a vital role in tandem with the role of hospital care.

There is also an ever growing appreciation for the valuable role nurses play in a proactive and preventative health system.

Business SA: What are your plans for expansion?

Virginia: My aim is to provide more South Australians with nursing care and health support in their home, get more people out of South Australian hospitals and continue to free up more hospital beds.

Home Support Services now has offices in South Australia and Queensland after a recent expansion to the Gold Coast. We continue to work closely with the Queensland Department of Health to explore further opportunities there. We are also considering other expansion opportunities along the eastern seaboard.

Business SA: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Virginia: I enjoy time with my family, in particular, getting together with my adult children.

I enjoy travelling with my husband and take this opportunity to indulge in my hobby of photography.

I also walk, bike ride and read as a means of relaxation. When I feel the need to "escape" from the demands of a working life, I jump on my red Vespa and go for a ride.

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