

OVER 15 YEARS AS A TPCH SOCIAL WORKER

To celebrate World Social Work Day in 2022, we asked some of our long serving team members about their time at TPCH, and how things have changed over the years.

SUZI GALLAGHER



How has the social work role at TPCH changed in the last 15yrs?

The SWs did all sort of tasks that we no longer do – the weirdest of which was ordering orthopaedic boots for patients (I never had to do this but lived in fear when I covering that role)

What do you enjoy the most about working at TPCH as a social worker?

I have worked in most of the roles so have enjoyed the wide variety of roles. I enjoy catching up with my many colleagues and some of the lively / quirky conversations. I appreciate the comradery and genuine care we have about each other.

What is the most obscure request for SW assistance that you have received in the last 15yrs?

There are so many obscure stories – both happy and sad. One weekend a 40yo-ish man was brought in to ED critically ill and needing urgent cardiac surgery – but wouldn't consent till his "pets" were cared for. It turned out he was a children's party entertainer – "Creepy Critters Parties" – with snakes, bats, crocodiles, frogs, possums and various birds. Needless to say – being thoroughly herpetophobic – I didn't offer to pop in! – Suzi Gallagher

SUSAN SMITH



Why did you decide to become a social worker?

I was about to finish an Arts Degree majoring in English and Psychology, and I just loved studying and wanted to stay at university longer! I was looking through the course outline for Agriculture (I also wanted to own an avocado and macadamia farm!) when I saw the Social Work course – that was it – working towards social justice, helping disadvantaged people live better lives, and generally saving the world – I knew that was what I wanted to do.

How has the social work role at TPCH changed in the last 15yrs?

It's so much busier in the Emergency Department now and there's been a steady increase in social presentations for everything from homelessness to domestic violence and emotional stressors, so I feel our role is valuable in helping address these issues, provide additional support and referrals and assist with patient flow;



Why did you decide to become a social worker?

I always knew I wanted to work in a 'helping' profession after completing Year 12. I was tossing up between Primary school teacher and Social Worker.

I decided to become a social worker to 'help' vulnerable children/people/families through the complexities of life and to support them during their most difficult times.

How has the social work role at TPCH changed in the last 15yrs?

It sure has evolved – the SW department was very small – I was the youngest Social worker at the time (I started here in 2007) and I was surrounded by very experienced clinicians. In my role (general Medicine), I would often be asked to provide practical assistance – deliver phone cards, 'petty cash,' wait on hold to Centrelink for over 40 minutes for patients, buy cigarettes for patients at Chermshire shops (Using patients' money and keeping evidence of purchase of course)

MARISSA GALLER



What do you enjoy the most about working at TPCH as a social worker?

I thoroughly enjoy coming to work (it may also have something to do with sorting respite from the chaotic family life). I enjoy:

- Being a part of an incredibly dynamic and effective team
- Working within an MDT where each allied health member works effortlessly to achieve positive health outcomes,
- The presence of supportive leadership not only within our department but also our clinical program
- Feeling supported by my peers



PETRINA HOLMES

Why did you decide to become a social worker?

I came to Social Work as a 17year old, straight from school. At the time I didn't have a full understanding of what a Social Worker did but I knew it was about working with people going through challenging times in their lives and I wanted to learn how to help them. Social Work put words and a framework to things I had felt passionate about – like the inequalities, discrimination, bullying and abuses that I was witness to either at home, at school or in my community. Issues such as child abuse, domestic violence, school bullying, barriers faced by people with disabilities, youth homelessness, discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous people, and third world inequalities. I learned that Social Work valued respect for all people, self-determination and social justice, values which I shared, so I knew I was in the right place.

How has the social work role at TPCH changed in the last 15yrs?

The department has grown, and many staff have retired over the years. Some differences in the Social Work role over the years have been: there previously was Family accommodation on site in Red Cross Rooms that was looked after by the Social Workers; Some Social Workers had a role in Tissue Donation – being the contact person to bereaved families to gain consent for tissue donation; Interim care was on site; General Medicine and General Surgery services only began in 2007; the Children's Cardiac Surgery service and ward was located here until around 2007.



What is the most obscure request for SW assistance that you have received in the last 15yrs?

The most obscure request for SW assistance I have had was to arrange care for a German Shepherd guard dog that had been locked in a cage in a Motel Room for a day and a half and it's owner needed to stay in hospital for another day – there was no easy answer for that one other than to advocate for the patient to have day leave to make arrangements for the dog.

ANNE LI

Why did you decide to become a social worker?

My mum and brother had bipolar disorder, so I was doing volunteer work for the Queensland Association for Mental Health while I was studying economics at uni. That experience led me to decide to study social work after I finished my economics degree. My family all worked in health, my dad was a geriatrician, my mum was a dietitian, two brothers are GPs, one brother is a medical laboratory scientist now working in safety and quality, and my sister is an occupational therapist.

How has the social work role at TPCH changed in the last 15yrs?

Since I started working at TPCH in 2002, the department has more than tripled in size. We used to be a heart and lung specialist hospital. In 2007 we expanded to include general medicine, general surgery, and a general emergency department. Prior to this, I used to cover cystic fibrosis, the emergency department, and the infectious diseases ward. Those areas are now covered by three social workers. A lot of things have changed, but a lot have stayed the same.



What do you enjoy the most about working at TPCH as a social worker?

Every day is different, it's never dull! I love meeting and getting to know patients and families, all are unique and it's our challenge to understand them when our lives are so different. I love working with geriatric teams, I think geriatrics is my spiritual home.

What is the most obscure request for SW assistance that you have received in the last 15yrs?

We recently had an older gentleman who had no known next of kin. He told us he had a sister in Denmark, he only had her name and the town she lives in. I managed to find her via Facebook! I remember when the internet was starting back in the 80s, we wondered what information would be available. We thought it would be like an encyclopaedia on the computer. It's amazing that you can reunite a patient with his sister because of the internet.