



Media Release

Bill's a Friend for Life

The kindness and generosity of Friends of RPH member Bill Middleton has been recognised by Rotary Western Australia, with the caring 63-year-old from Maylands being awarded the organisation's top honours for 2008.

Mr Middleton has received the Paul Harris Award, named after the organisation's founder, for the work he does helping patients from remote Aboriginal communities to cope with the sometimes daunting hospital experience.

Since joining the Friends of RPH in May 2000, Mr Middleton has dedicated himself to liaising with Aboriginal patients and to making their hospital journey as smooth as possible.

As a member of the Country Patient Service, he embraces the Aboriginal culture and visits indigenous patients at both the Wellington Street and Shenton Park campuses of RPH.

"If you've lived in a remote Aboriginal community all your life, you would be lucky to see 10 white faces out of 200," Mr Middleton said. "When people come down to Perth to be in hospital, the experience can be overwhelming, in particular for the older Aboriginal people who are not familiar with the city or a hospital environment."

Mr Middleton makes it his mission to link family members together when more than one is admitted to RPH so they can share their experiences and be more comfortable during their stay.

He also has learned some phrases from a number of Aboriginal dialects to help him communicate with the elders, as well as making time to take them to church on Sundays, despite not having a driver's licence.

Mr Middleton became interested in volunteer work after his wife succumbed to diabetes-related heart failure after spending three months at RPH.

At the time Mr Middleton divided his time between full-time work and visiting his wife before and after work and during his lunch breaks.

"I truly believe that God wants me to do this work," Mr Middleton said. "Centrelink once asked me exactly what it was that I did and I replied: 'I bring hope to people in this life and bring hope to them for the next life.'"

Mr Middleton said he felt humbled by the award and hoped it would benefit Aboriginal people staying at RPH by securing funding for a dedicated meeting room where the patients could "talk and share".

"It's something special and something which I'm proud to receive - I didn't expect it," Mr Middleton said.

Manager General Services Kaye Crosswell said that many indigenous country patients felt frightened and insecure when they came to the city, and Bill, who speaks their dialect, put them at ease and provided them with comfort and support.

“He attends doctor’s visits with the patients, links them with other patients from their communities, who are similarly homesick, and if they have friends or relatives in different hospitals he will take them for a visit. On occasions Bill has been contacted at home by nursing staff requesting him to come to the hospital to visit a patient who may be upset and he does this without hesitation,” Ms Crosswell said.

“Bill completes banking for country indigenous patients, takes them on weekend visits, takes them to and from the airport, teaches them how to use public transport, takes them shopping or does their shopping for them, and remarkably he has no driver’s license.”

“He has been known to sit with a patient at the Shenton Park Campus to comfort them whilst a relative is being buried, and when he has gone up north with Hospital staff to install medical equipment it is amazing how many former patients wish to visit him as he is held in such high esteem.

“A shy and humble man, Bill is a ‘Friend’ in every sense of the word and it is a pleasure to see him in the wards sitting with an Aboriginal patient in deep conversation or going about his duties,” Ms Crosswell said.

Media Contact: Connie Clarke | Public Relations | Royal Perth Hospital | 9224 2209 or 0404 894 009