

Media release

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Fay Tomlin – nursing all over the world

For Wairarapa Hospital Acute Services nurse practitioner Fay Tomlin, nursing has provided a career that has taken her all over the world.

Fay first trained as a nurse and later as a midwife in the UK. It was while working in Sydney on her OE that Fay got the inspiration to combine a love of flying with her nursing skills.

“I got to spend a day with the Royal Australian Flying Doctor Service and thought how cool it would be to work in this way – working autonomously as a nurse in the outback and flying to see patients.”

On returning to the UK, Fay set about gaining the additional qualifications and experience to consider pursuing this as the next stage in her career. This included volunteering to serve with the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, which involved “weekend warrior training” and being deployed in times of need to support military and humanitarian operations.

Fay was still doing her military training when she got called up to assist in the Iraq conflict as a flight nurse, working from a base in Cyprus. This was followed a few years later with a second six-month deployment working as a lead flight nurse within the aeromedical evacuation team in Afghanistan. Fay said she enjoyed the challenges that came with the “amazing experience” of working in high pressured war zone situations.

“It combined everything I love doing; the nursing as well as challenging myself physically and mentally. It’s a work hard, play hard environment where you make life-long friends with the people you work alongside.”

Fay’s experience of working in emergency situations also included being the matron of a large 24-hour urgent care centre in England. Coming to New Zealand for a better work life balance, Fay joined Wairarapa Hospital four years ago after working in general practice in Northland. She said her role here provides an opportunity to utilise her previous experience with working in a rural hospital.

“The hospital here is big enough that it’s interesting – every day you see different things – while being small enough to be really personal. I know most of the staff here by name and I can’t walk around the supermarket without seeing people that I’ve helped at some time in my role here.”

Fay combines her work in the hospital’s Emergency Department (ED) with an on-call role with the New Zealand Medical Assistance Team (NZMAT). This multi-disciplinary medical team is available to quickly respond to natural disasters and pandemics in New Zealand and the South Pacific.

“Joining the NZMAT allows me to continue to use the experience gained from my military career to assist with short term emergency situations. I get to work hard for the DHB while potentially using my skills to help people in really distressing times.”

Fay said working in trauma and emergency situations provided an opportunity to help people when they most need it.

“No one wants to come to ED; most people come here because they’ve got an urgent problem. We’ve got the privilege to be part of their lives for a brief time and potentially help to fix that problem, as well as provide advice that could improve other aspects of their health for the better.”

ENDS

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Field photos taken in Afghanistan