

# **DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**May 2021**

## **Celebrating the ACTs nurses and midwives**

I wish to thank Ms Stephen-Smith for bringing to the attention of the Assembly the importance for recognition of our nurses and midwives.

It seems appropriate that International Day of the Midwife is the fifth of May and International Day of Nurses is a week later, on the twelfth of May, with Mother's Day this year in between.

It's a week to recognise all the women and men in our community who provide services for the health and wellbeing of us all. I note both the women and men who work in this sector – I think it's commonly regarded, as with the teaching profession, as a sector which is largely comprised of a female workforce. The statistics definitely support this -

In 2018, 88% of people practising as nurses and midwives in the ACT were female. And, of the 170 midwives in the ACT, only one was male. These are comparable statistics across all jurisdictions in Australia.

I find this really interesting in the context of the gendered landscape and commonly held gender norms in which we live. Undoubtedly, midwifery in particular, is historically and traditionally a role undertaken by women. To a lesser extent, but still very much prevailing, is nursing.

In much the same way that the construction industry, among others, is typically a male dominated space.

I recognise that that a range of different factors influence our career choices and life aspirations, But I also believe that it's really important that both women and men have the opportunity to challenge our society's gendered norms and landscapes.

It's great to see more and more women joining what have been – traditionally – male-dominated industries; and the positive promotion given to this through media articles and awards of recognition.

It is often said that nursing and related professions require good communication skills, together with empathy, care and patience. I believe both men and women are more than capable of possessing and demonstrating these qualities.

I would like to challenge more men to take up positions in nursing and midwifery.

Often, like many of the professions and industries that sustain us as a community, the daily work and achievements of nurses and midwives go unnoticed and unrecognised. This week is an opportunity to change that.

The annual midwifery day has been held since its formal establishment in 1992.

May 12 was chosen as the International Day for Nurses, coinciding with the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing in the late nineteenth century. Some of Nightingale's key social reforms included improving healthcare for all sections of British society, advocating for hunger relief programs in India, helping to abolish prostitution laws that were harsh for women, and expanding the acceptable forms of female participation in the workforce.

Nurses work across many different areas in our communities. They might be specialised nurses in areas of mental health, intensive care, theatre and neurology, and they might work not only in hospitals and practitioner clinics, but in aged care homes, child health centres, schools, child health centres and community health centres. Midwives provide important services to improve maternal and child health care and to achieve the best possible outcomes for mothers and babies.

At some point or another, we all come in contact with nurses and midwives.

The International Days for Midwifery and Nurses are also an opportunity to support the call to ensure appropriate education and resourcing for people working in this sector. This year's theme for International Day of Midwives is 'Follow the data: Invest in Midwives'.

It's to the benefit and advantage of us all that investment is made in appropriate resourcing, and to provide ongoing opportunities for education and professionalisation, and to show the value of nurses and midwives' work, to encourage them to stay in their profession.

2020 was the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife – a year intended to highlight and celebrate the work of nurses and midwives. I expect no one anticipated just how much highlight, and through what lens and pressure the nursing sector, in particular, would be placed under last year, and continuing, through the pandemic.

Now, more than ever, is a great time to recognise and thank our nurses and midwives.

Thank you.