

## Rhonda Cowderoy



Rhonda Cowderoy's diverse nursing career spanned more than forty years. Beginning work with a short stint as a junior typist, she next enrolled as a cadet nurse in October 1968 aged just sixteen and a half. When she turned seventeen she was able to train in general nursing at Murwillumbah District Hospital, graduating in May 1972. Coincidentally, this was the same hospital where she was born in 1952. She grew up in Yelgun on the N.S.W. North Coast, the youngest of six, and was the daughter of Alfred and Ann Bashforth.

Now a registered nurse and married, she moved to Sydney where she commenced training at Canterbury Hospital in midwifery. Once qualified she worked at Bankstown Hospital in the labour wards and then the operating suites. This then was the beginning of her career as an Operating or Perioperative Nurse. In 1976 there was another career change when Rhonda left public hospitals to work in the private sector. Firstly, at Jamieson Private Hospital in the operating theatres until 1985, then Minchinbury Community Hospital theatres until 1987, returning to the operating theatres at Nepean Public Hospital until her retirement in 2012. Her last three or four years at Nepean were as the Surgical Co – Ordinator responsible for compiling the hospital theatre lists for surgeons. Rhonda would experience during her long career the advancement of complex procedures and equipment in her profession, especially the labour intensive reuse of consumables to single use sterile items.

Rhonda regards the highlight of her long nursing career as the overseas humanitarian work she volunteered for, particularly as a member of the Australian Bravo surgical-medical team that responded to the massive destruction in Banda Aceh Indonesia following the earthquake and tsunami on Boxing Day 2004. Both the Bravo and Alpha teams were recognised with awards for their volunteer service. Rhonda wrote an insightful account, that was published in ACORN (attached), of what the team experienced first hand during their short but invaluable time there. Conditions were unbelievably challenging requiring improvisation, long working

hours, dedication and determination. Rhonda has also shared her Banda Aceh experiences by giving public talks. Although retired, in 2014 Rhonda went with Aussie Bangla Smile to Bangladesh where surgeries were performed, mainly on babies and small children, for cleft palates and release surgeries after burns. She volunteers at the Emu Plains Chapter of Days 4 Girls which provides sanitary products and health education throughout the world. She socialises regularly with former colleagues, enjoys quilting and is kept busy babysitting her two grandsons. Although retired for nine years Rhonda still misses her life as an Operating Nurse which she describes as being 'very rewarding and enjoyable work.'

**Nurse Cowderoy wrote an article *A surgical nurse's experience in Banda Aceh* for ACORN Magazine (vol 18 no 2 Winter 2005 pp16-18). [Click Here.](#)**



Rhonda in Bangladesh