

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Forty years of service celebrated at Warwick Hospital**

A rare milestone was celebrated this week when occupational therapist (OT) Wendy Abbott was honoured for forty years of service at Warwick Hospital.

Warwick Hospital Director of Nursing Anita Bolton praised the level of commitment shown by Ms Abbott over the past four decades.

"It is a tremendous milestone and one that is probably not going to be achieved by many people in the future," Ms Bolton said.

"To have 40 years in one workplace is an achievement that reflects a work ethic based on asking what a person can do for their organisation and the community they serve.

"The dedication and devotion that Wendy has shown is a very rare commodity and the intimate knowledge she has of the community in which she works is unparalleled.

"I would like to offer Wendy our sincerest congratulations on this wonderful achievement."

As a graduate of the very first degree course in occupational therapy offered by the University of Queensland Wendy broke new ground in her field.

"When I started in 1976 occupational therapists were known as 'play ladies' or 'basket ladies' because what we did was not really very well understood and it was assumed we sat around helping patients weave baskets all day," Mrs Abbott said.

"My first budget for equipment was \$500 which didn't go very far and I started out with a screwdriver and a saw which I used if I had to do a modification to a piece of equipment for a patient.

"There were very few OTs around back then so we had to carve a niche and demonstrate what we could, so it is very satisfying to see how occupational therapy has become an integral part of our modern healthcare system."

Wendy said she had done more than 20,000 home visits in her four decades of service, and estimated that she had driven more than 900,000km getting to and from work from her home in Stanthorpe. She said one of the most rewarding aspects of her career had been to see students realise there are career opportunities in areas away from metropolitan centres.

"It has been a wonderful experience to help and mentor more than 30 students over the years," she said.

"I've tried to show them that you can move west of Cunningham's Gap and still have a fulfilling professional life, and to see some former students come back and do that very thing after graduation has been very satisfying.

"I have always instilled in students the notion that it is a very great privilege to be allowed into people's lives and homes, and to always concentrate on working towards achieving what the patient wants, in accordance with their goals, rather than imposing on them what we think they might need."

Jacinta Fromm, Warwick Hospital allied health team leader and colleague of 25 years, said Wendy epitomised the ethos of patient-centred care.

“Wendy is very committed to the patient and their care, she communicates openly about options available to patients, respects their right to make choices, and she engages with them in a way that goes beyond a simple OT-patient relationship” Ms Fromm said.

“Regardless of the patient’s age, health status or level of impairment, Wendy is able to connect with everyone.

“With Wendy it’s all about empathy and advocating for the patient to help them achieve as much independence as possible with safety and dignity.”

**Ends**

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