WORKING LIFE: ROSE MCCROHAN

By Natalie Dragon

The first drug and alcohol nurse practitioner in Victoria, Rose McCrohan received the Clinician Award by The Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs in late 2015.

With almost 25 years’ experience in the area, Rose has managed or helped establish multiple withdrawal programs, including setting up Victoria’s first mother and baby withdrawal service due to open in October.

“It’s a very inspirational field to work in and very different from what the community perhaps perceives. We work with people who essentially have the ability to recover.”

“Most of our people have had heartbreaking things happen to them; there are very high levels of violence and abuse. As a result of their drug use they have made poor decisions on top of that – it is remarkable they continue to find hope.”

Rose did an elective in her final year of study. “I was inspired by the lecturer. Then a job came up at a D&A hospital which has since closed. I took a grad position and the rest is history.”

Rose has been at Uniting Care’s 16-bed nurse run ReGen unit in North West Melbourne for 10 years. She is the Nurse Unit Manager and a NP. “It’s a dual role. I am a manager but still have a high clinical load. I switch hats.”

As a NP, Rose has a provider number and manages her own admissions along with three other GPs in the community. “The timing of my endorsement could not have been better (2009). This role allows the NP on site phenomenal access for patients to prescribe methadone and suboxone (for opiate addiction). There is virtually no drug of dependence that I cannot treat.”

As with all D&A treatment, the cornerstone is supportive care, says Rose. “The human spirit is very strong and people have a willingness to recover. Most people never thought they would cross the boundaries they have. The choices they have made to sustain their habit do not rest easily on their soul. A lot of people have suicidal thoughts – just to be here, they choose to live.

The biggest change in the D&A sector and with clients and the community is acceptance that seven days will not cure someone, says Rose. “It is a huge emotionally filled area with clients and families; there is often the view ‘just get them into detox’.

“People come in here wanting the seven day miracle but you cannot reverse in seven days what has been done for years and years. It is long term.”

Seven days builds resilience and keeps them going, says Rose. “It’s a life skill and education based program.” Inpatient group programs include: yoga; art therapy; liver care; relapse prevention; and goal setting.

“We see them relapse – it’s a normal part of the journey but they get a little bit closer (to recovery). We are very aware that it is a chronic relapsing condition.”

Mother and baby service

The four-bedded mother and baby service, funded by the DHHS, is due to open in ReGen in October. It is based on the mental health model for mothers with babies up to 12 months, says Rose. “It is a service for the mother to keep her child with her while she withdraws.”

ReGen has cared for 15 mothers with babies in the unit over the past 10 years. “The idea is that women come here first and then on the way to a rehab program and take the children with them or return to the community with supports.

“We won’t take babies imminently to be removed from parents care. But for those that if they had sought treatment six months earlier, just may have prevented removal of children from their care,” Rose says.

“We will work with a range of different hospitals, all different clinics and D&A services. We expect an increase in antenatal referrals and maternal child and health services and postnatal depression referrals.”

There are currently four D&A NPs and another five mental health NPs who work in D&A roles in Victoria, says Rose. A mental health and drug and alcohol collaborative with a membership of 50 has seen an increase in NPs and NP Candidates who have done the methadone and suboxone prescriber course. “We are promoting NPs to fill the biggest rural gaps,” says Rose, already seen at Albury-Wodonga Health and Traralgon, Gippsland. “We are seeing an increase in skill base in mental health and dual diagnoses.”

Nurses who work in the D&A field are big on social justice, says Rose. “I think there is an element to their work here – advocating for people who are significantly disempowered. I love it. It’s very fulfilling.”

For more information go to: www.regen.org.au