

Anthroposophic Nursing Pathways

I recently caught up with three nurses who completed an anthroposophic nursing course at different stages of their nursing journeys. I was interested to see how they were able to incorporate their experiences and learning from Taruna into their professional practice.

Rachel Chapman, marketing and student coordinator, Taruna College

Sheryl – Palliative Care Nurse

Sheryl has recently retired from her position as a palliative care nurse at Te Omanga Hospice in Lower Hutt. Sheryl was one of the earlier adopters of anthroposophical nursing in New Zealand and at that time completed a three-year course - the Diploma in Anthroposophic Nursing.

What was your pathway into anthroposophic nursing?

My interest was sparked by my children being in a Steiner school. Initially I was a practice nurse working alongside a GP who had specialized in anthroposophic medicine and was immediately able to see in this setting that the supportive nursing therapies that were prescribed alongside the medical support gave benefits to the patients. Their overall wellbeing improved as we worked with them out of a picture of the whole person. After being a practice nurse, I was able to offer a private therapeutic practice still working with an anthroposophic doctor.

Tell me about your experience working in the hospice

I worked from 2005 for 14 years offering compassionate care for both patients, their families and other nursing colleagues. We were in a fortunate position to have a team of nurses, including a few who also had a background in anthroposophic nursing. As a nurse within the hospice the role was to offer whatever support we could, both within the hospice and out in the community. The background in anthroposophic nursing enabled more possibilities to help. As a nursing team, those of us with the knowledge knew that the anthroposophic therapies were supportive within palliative care, but it was the feedback we received from the patients and their families and other members of the hospice team that enabled us to continue to offer these therapies because the positive response was evident.

Nikki – currently works at Hōhepa Hawkes Bay as a RN.

Hōhepa is a community that support people with people with intellectual disability to live a full life. She also has experience working as a Psycho-geriatric Nurse, Elder Care and School Nurse.

What was your pathway into anthroposophic nursing?

My pathway into AN is different from many AN nurses as my working background was primarily in the natural health field before I became a registered nurse. My interest in Anthroposophy was sparked way back in the 1990's when I worked in manufacturing for 4 years at Weleda. Over this time, I became familiar with the Weleda remedies and met many wonderful people from the "Steiner Community" including anthroposophic doctors and nurses. From that time, I wanted to become an anthroposophic nurse but had to wait for the time to become "right" for me to study to become a Registered Nurse which was a prerequisite at that time for post graduate AN studies.

Tell me initially about your work in elder care?

I have experience working as a Registered Nurse extensively with people with dementia and as a clinical nurse manager for a rest home. Although a great privilege to care for this very vulnerable cohort of people, the environment was often stressful requiring me to draw on many aspects of nursing including mental health, acute care, and palliative care - often in a rushed and under-resourced environment. Learning about the "Nursing Gestures" in the Foundation Course was both supportive and resourceful for me. With knowledge of these gestures that underpin our work I brought a new "awareness" to the work I was doing that I believe greatly benefited the people I was supporting along with my own development as a health professional. I was able to begin to incorporate some of the therapies alongside our everyday nursing care of patient wellbeing and medical/drugs treatments. Many of the patients were non-verbal and so much of our communication with them was through a felt sense or deep observation of how they responded to a certain touch, smell, a simple rhythmical massage, or footbath. The integration of these treatments had to be simple and effective alongside the ordinary working life. What this meant for the patients was that they could receive this more intimate home-level care for longer. It highlighted to me the importance of rhythm, diet, and simple lifestyle measures alongside their medical support.

Tell me a little about your role now working with adults with disability

I work as a registered nurse for Hōhepa supporting people with intellectual disabilities to live meaningful, healthy, and creative lives. For children through to adults, the joy of involvement, achievement and learning through education and meaningful work alongside artisan craftspeople is a wonderful way for the people to grow and contribute. Hōhepa is also a 'home for life' where 'aging with dignity' is the focus in the elder care homes.

At this stage, 4 days of the week I do "regular nursing" providing nursing assessment to support those living in the adult community. One day of the week is dedicated to offering anthroposophic nursing therapies. As with my elder care work, many of the people that we support are non-verbal so my experience working with people (both as a registered nurse and a natural therapist) is valuable and it is thrilling for me to work in an environment where the use of anthroposophic remedies is commonplace. To me this is truly holistic healthcare where understanding people as more than a physical body, is a priority.

Tell me why the course at Taruna supported you as a nurse?

I found that I learnt so many more tools for my nursing kit. I was able to not just work with the physical body but the whole person that incorporated the mental and the spiritual. I guess the course gave me a "language" that helped to explain in tangible terms the often "intangible". I learnt not just about the therapies but a lot about myself as both a person and a nurse. I developed a lot of self-awareness through the course that has really helped me work within the communities that I have. Nursing environments are challenging, and the course has helped me to learn how to care for myself and to keep well enough to serve my patients well.

Donna – Mental Health Nurse

What was your pathway into Anthroposophic nursing?

I have been a community mental health nurse, working in secondary services since 2007. While this is such a rewarding area of work, I found myself in 2019 looking to practice nursing in a more meaningful and holistic way. I needed to find a way to refresh and renew my passion for my work.

Tell me a little about your experience in working as a mental health nurse?

I work with clients experiencing a wide range of mental health disorders. These include the major mood, anxiety, and psychotic illnesses. I also work with addictions and those experiencing suicidal ideation. I support treatment plans, medication therapy, and after-hours crisis intervention. Having worked in a Māori mental health service, I can really see how anthroposophic nursing aligns with Te Whare Tapa Whā.

Tell me why the course at Taruna supported you as a nurse?

Taruna allowed me, at a time when I felt despondent, to really feel at home and embrace the language of Anthroposophy. I felt incredibly supported by the tutors and my nursing colleagues. The course has enabled me to refine my assessment skills, and have a deeper level of engagement and understanding, allowing greater access to the many layers of insight that can inform each situation. I can better advocate for clients, as I understand them more, and the difficulties of the interface they have with the world, which is often part of the experience of their journey of mental health issues. I have better tools for helping clients understand their journey in relationship to their life story, as I work further to comprehend and integrate some of the biography and development ideas that were introduced in the course. Speaking of this work freely, helps to lift the veil of mental illness, for clients and our communities. My patience and support towards my colleagues has improved, as I have gained a greater understanding of the impact of stress that comes with nursing in the current healthcare system. The course has emphasised the importance of rhythm in our lives, and I can support others to understand how this can help.

The course at Taruna has supported me to look inwardly and be reflective of my own journey. It has provided me with a framework and the courage to recognise my own weaknesses and improve my overall wellbeing. I believe it has supported me to be the best nurse I can be for myself and my clients.