

Another Day

The alarm pulled me awake and the sound of the air conditioner reminded me of where I was, working as a Midwife/RN in the north of Inland Western Australia. I am here in the 'build-up', the season that is famed to send you 'tropo', the time of year when searing hot humid days are punctuated by magnificent storms with spectacular lightening and pouring rains. An area of Australia unsurpassed for its stark beauty contrasted by a harsh and desolate landscape.

I made the short journey across the road to the hospital, but already I am in a lather of perspiration. A couple of the patients and their visitors greet me from under the enormous frangipani trees, 'good morning sister' they say with a laugh.

After our morning handover I realised that I will have a busy but manageable day. I was allocated five patients, a combination of two medical patients, Gracie and Betts, a sixteen year male psychiatric patient who has a security guard stationed outside his door and two post-natal women; a young Indigenous woman who two days earlier had her fourth baby and a Caucasian woman Karen who last night delivered her first baby. My load of patients is one less than the other staff due to me being the sole midwife on today and I may have to attend to a labouring woman should one arrive.

I am chatted with Karen about her night when she asked me nonchalantly 'are dogs allowed in here!', 'no' I answered surprised at her question.

'Well one just walked down the corridor' she replied laughing.

I excused myself from her room and set off to investigate. Sure enough a cattle dog was happily trotting along the corridor following faithfully behind his owner who had disappeared into the laundry room.

As I approached I saw as his owner who was not a patient but a nearby resident, busily emptying the contents of a large garbage bag into the washing machine.

'Excuse me, I am sorry but dogs aren't allowed inside the hospital' I explain politely.

'I'm just do'n som wash'n' mumbles Mrs dog owner in a low voice.

'That's ok' I offered, 'but you need to take your dog outside first'.

With this she walked off down the corridor, passing the security guard as she left.

I approached our security guard who was staring at his I-Pad while munching on a large packet of twisties and sipping his coke: he has his ear phones on when I approach.

'Did you see that lady come in with her dog' I ask. Suddenly there was a scurry of activity from our friend as he hurriedly removed his ear phones and sprang to his feet. 'How did she get past me' he exclaimed with an honest look of disbelief on this face. Mmmm I was lost for words.

The morning progressed and I was hoped for a chance to have my morning tea break when I heard Gracie calling out. 'Sister, sister, toilet, toilet' Gracie was heavy work she was very uncooperative when transferring and it was at least a three-person job.

"I will get some help Gracie" I told her. On our return it took a lot of coaxing to put Gracie onto the commode and push her into the toilet. We were waiting for her to finish when the announcement came over the PA that fire alarm testing was about to begin. A loud series of bells and 'woop woops' followed. Suddenly a semi dressed Gracie appeared in the doorway looking panicked. "Fire, Fire" she called as she miraculously and efficiently hurried towards the fire exit!

Definitely time for that cuppa now I thought!

After my well-earned break I went into find Bett's bed empty. According to Gracie 'she gone into town'. I was concerned considering she still had a cannula in her arm! I checked with other staff, this I was told, was common practice and I should just note on her medication chart 'not in bed' if something fell due during her absence.

And so ended another eventful day of my remote nursing experience, a day of laughter and expecting the unexpected, a unique and challenging experience that I will long cherish.
