

Obituary Sheree Fairhurst (nee East) RN, ADN, RM, MN (Hons)

12 August 1961 – 30 March 2025

Sheree began her working life in the health sector as a registered nurse. In the early 1990s she undertook her Diploma in Midwifery and worked as one of the early pioneering hospital-based continuity of care midwives at Burwood Hospital. After her son, John was born she returned to work, and in 2000 became Regional Manager of the Canterbury Cervical Screening Programme. In 2001 Sheree was appointed Director of Nursing at Nurse Maude.

In her more than 16 years with Nurse Maude, Sheree applied her considerable nursing and midwifery knowledge and experience to furthering the charity organisation's work in community and specialist nursing. She continued her further education completing a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Sciences (Nursing) in 2007. Her significant contribution to the development and use of clinical information systems, the development of HealthOne and the use of telehealth in community care demonstrated her impressive ability for research, development and collaboration. As the driving force behind the establishment of the New Zealand Institute of Community Health Care, Sheree was instrumental in creating a centre of excellence for the management of research and development projects that directly benefited community health.

Sheree's leadership at Nurse Maude, was mirrored by her involvement in wider national and international initiatives. She was highly regarded within the national and regional health alliances, reference groups and committees on which she served and was a strong believer in social justice and equity for those navigating the health system. She was instrumental in bringing the international Omaha System taxonomy to NZ, working with private enterprise and government agencies to have a NZ version developed, implemented and mandated for use by the national Clinical Leaders Group. She attended and presented her work at conferences in NZ and internationally, and in 2015 she completed her Masters of Nursing. Her thesis focused on the relevance of Omaha System to community nursing and allied health practitioners in NZ. Sheree's efforts were recognised later that year at the Health Informatics NZ (HINZ) Conference, when she was awarded the Robyn Carr Spirit Cup for her contribution to nursing informatics in NZ. In August 2024 (not long after a shock cancer diagnosis) Sheree was delighted to learn that the Omaha System (NZ version) had been released by Te Whatu Ora/Health NZ Health Terminology Service (NZHTS), making it available via FHIR API to IT vendors and health practitioners throughout NZ.

In 2017, Sheree had left Nurse Maude to marry and live in Dunedin. She began a new life supporting her husband Bruce Fairhurst in his property management enterprises, consulting to the University of Otago as a Professional Practice Fellow, and building new homes together in Dunedin, and on a lifestyle block at Millers Flat, Central Otago. She took great pleasure in her son John moving to Dunedin to work together with her and Bruce in property management. In her personal life, Sheree pursued varied interests. She enjoyed music and chocolate, and travelling, including in her small motorhome/bus. Her great love was Cocker Spaniels. As owner of Espaniel Kennels, Sheree was widely regarded as a top breeder, and successfully showed her own dogs, taking her bus to attend shows throughout NZ. A highlight for Sheree was travelling to the UK for the Crufts Dog Show in March 2017, accompanied by her new partner – later to become husband – Bruce.

Sheree was diagnosed with cancer in mid-2024, and drew on all of her experience leading community nursing and palliative care services to understand and support herself to achieve a good outcome. Sadly, despite the best efforts of herself, her family and the care team who supported her, Sheree died in the Otago Community Hospice on 30 March 2025. Her loss will be felt for some time, but her legacy to community nursing and nursing informatics will remain.

Sheree was well-liked and widely regarded by all who met her in both personal and professional capacities. She is remembered with considerable respect and affection by those who had the privilege of spending time with her.

