



As an FCN I make a REAL difference in someone's life right where I live – you can too!

Kym was numb... chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery were required! How could this be? She was only 26 years old! “Bowel cancer...” the doctor had said. She was meant to be working, having holidays, playing with her 2 year old and enjoying life, not dealing with serious illness and possible death!

Kym met many doctors, and appointments came thick and fast. As a faith community nurse in Kym's church, I met with her to see how our church family could support her. Kym was overwhelmed. Crying she confided her struggles to me. Kym had no immediate family in Adelaide. She was a single parent raising her daughter on her own. Kym was scared about the future and that of her daughter. There were many questions and decisions to be made, so we began Kym's journey through cancer together.

Kevin was tired... Eve, his wife, was becoming more challenging to care for. With her advancing dementia came more complicated behaviour, more cooking, cleaning and household work. The woman he loved was disappearing and the grief left Kevin sad, exhausted and overwhelmed.

Kevin knew there were aged care options to help him, but he was too tired to be bothered trying to navigate the 'maze of paperwork'. He was sad at the thought of Eve moving to aged care, saying he felt as if he was failing her. “All her memories are here and she will have nothing of her past to hang on to if she goes into a home.” said Kevin dejectedly. I listened to Kevin's heartfelt concerns. I located information about services and processes for respite and possible permanent care and talked to Kevin and his family about their options.

As a Faith Community Nurse (FCN) in my church I see people holistically, as body, mind and spirit, living in relationships, with God, others and the creation, so their support and care needs to consider all these aspects. I always begin by listening and praying with people (if they want this). I also counsel, educate, help navigate systems, find resources, provide information and support to help people like Kym and Kevin to make decisions and take actions to support their health and wellbeing. I am part of the health and pastoral care ministry of my church. God places us into community to “love one another”. Pastoral care is the way my church organises that support. As an FCN I bring additional depth, focus and scope to this ministry, by using my professional knowledge and skills to support the various situations of people of all ages in my church and in my local community.

I have found the faith community nurse role enables me to volunteer in a ministry of compassionate care, stewardship and Christian service right where I live. The challenges are real, and the rewards are many. God is blessed, the person is blessed, and as the FCN -I am blessed. It's a win, win, win situation. To find out more, please visit AFCNA's website www.afcna.org.au, or email them at afcna@outlook.com, or afcna@afcna.org.au and they'll answer your questions and chat more.



What is faith community nursing?

In faith community nursing I bring my faith to community nursing, and nursing to my faith community. I provide whole-person care that considers body, mind and spirit on behalf of my church. I use my nursing knowledge and skills, which I underpin with Christian principles, to promote whole health and wellbeing with the people I serve.

I use empowerment approaches to work with people's strengths, plus I mobilise the support of others in our church to promote health; prevent disease, illness, injury and abuse; and help people with pre-existing conditions/illnesses to manage them effectively. The aim is for everyone to live their best life, full and flourishing, just as God intended life to be.

What do you do as a faith community nurse?

As an FCN I journey alongside people providing education, advocacy, counselling and coaching skills when people ask for that support. I support them to determine their health and wellbeing goals and enact action plans to achieve their goals.

I help people navigate the complexities of the health and community care systems, advocating for them when asked. I locate resources and refer people to appropriate services that can support them.

I spend time with people and listen to their story, pray with them (if they want it) and provide a hopeful and compassionate presence as they journey through life's struggles. Sometimes I get to give thanks with them and we celebrate as they move forward with their lives. In short, I bring my professional knowledge and skills which are joined with the specific gifts of people in our church, and together we help one another to do life together.

Who do you work with as a faith community nurse?

I work with my church's health and pastoral care team and together we serve our church family. We also reach out to many in our local community because we get referrals from health and community services in our area and many people self-refer because they are in tough places and need support.

What kind of person do you need to be to become a faith community nurse?

Firstly, I think you need to care about people. You need to be compassionate and patient, and be willing to serve others happily. You need a deep faith in Jesus as the source of your strength and wisdom, and you should be willing to share Jesus' message of love and hope in how you act and what you say.

Many people I see are in low places, struggling with hopelessness, helplessness, loneliness and mental and spiritual distress. So a large part of my role is to give them time and really listen to their story. I seek to encourage them and inspire hope, and allow them to connect with God. I have time to develop healing relationships. Then as people improve I draw on my nursing knowledge and skills to help them understand their situation find their strengths and consider fresh options to move forward with life.



What do you enjoy about being a faith community nurse?

I love it! It's the most rewarding 'job' I've had. In fact I feel my FCN role fulfils my calling from God to become a nurse. It brings meaning and purpose to my nursing because I can freely and openly provide whole person care, praying and providing spiritual care. I answered the call to become a nurse in faith, and my trust and dependence on God has grown my faith which has in turn changed the way I practice. I feel like my heart has come home in this role. All those years of nursing in hospitals, community, teaching and research did bring job satisfaction, but it pales into insignificance compared to the joy and fulfilment I experience in the FCN role.

Are faith community nurses all volunteers, or are some paid?

Overseas many FCNs are salaried by their congregations, or the salary is shared between churches, paid by hospitals or other health/community/aged care services, or grants. However, in Australia there are few salaried FCNs. I volunteer in my FCN role within my local church, working 8 hours each week, and I have done it for 15 years. I find great joy and reward in the role. I also work part time in other paid nursing roles. Salary is not what validates my FCN role, because I have seen lives changed due to my FCN service. However, I hope there will be paid FCN roles in Australian churches in the future.

Where can a faith community nurse work?

There are thousands of FCNs across the world working in the faith communities of every major religion. In Australia AFCNA focuses its support on Christian faith communities. Faith communities include churches, faith-based hospitals, health/community/disability/aged care services, school/colleges/universities, and various faith-based not-for-profits and charitable organisations.

How can someone become a faith community nurse?

First, you need to love God and love people. Have a look at the Australian Faith Community Nurses Association's (AFCNA) website for more information and read the articles on their website. Ask God if this is his call on your life, and pray for the Holy Spirit's leading. You can talk to someone from AFCNA and ask questions by contacting them at afcna@outlook.com or afcna@afcna.org.au.

The FCN role is for currently registered nurses with no restrictions on their practice. It's helpful to have had a few years of experience because you are often working in an autonomous nursing role as an FCN.

AFCNA provides a brief 'Introducing Faith Community Nursing' on-line course, which is free. It will help you decide whether this is a role for you. If you want to go further AFCNA provides a 'Foundations of Faith Community Nursing' on-line course (or face to face from time to time). This is an in-depth essential preparation for the FCN role. Talk to the AFCNA national mentor and/or AFCNA, because they can help you approach your church leadership to explain the role and its fit with the health and pastoral care ministry and the overall mission of your church.

This role is a calling from God and he may be calling you, so consider it. You will be blessed!