

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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I commenced my nursing career as a trainee enrolled nurse at St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst and in the first intake of Enrolled Nursing students at Sydney Technical College in July 1986. Nursing education had been moved into the College system creating a nursing shortage in the hospital system so we were the "special funded" group. I had been accepted into a Diploma in Applied Science at Sydney College of Advanced Education but I was unsure if I wanted to commit to 3 years of study, graduate and not know how to be a nurse. I applied for the enrolled nursing position because I thought that if I loved nursing, I could use it as a springboard to college and to work my way through while gaining vital hospital experience. If I didn't like it, I had only wasted a year.

The grounding I got in my first six week block put me in good stead for the rest of my nursing career. The basics - how to make a bed, how to make someone comfortable, how to give a sponge bath and take a set of observations, how to talk to a total stranger in a way that makes them feel that you really want to care for them - will never go away. That one room in the Ultimo campus where we even had to unpack the equipment and set things up before we got down to it will have a place in my heart forever.

By the time we started our second block the following February, a commitment to the course had been shown by the Department of TAFE in that they had refurbished the old school in Sussex Street into a complete Nursing building. We had wards, tutorial rooms and student and staff areas in an awesome little campus. By this time I had already decided that nursing was what I wanted to do and planned on enrolling in my DipAppSci (Nursing) the following year. I completed my Enrolled Nursing Certificate and continued working at St Vincent's in the Neurosurgery/Neurology unit. I commenced college in 1988 and worked at St Vincents and did some agency work while studying - even orientating my fellow students to the wards as I knew them better than my preceptors. I left college after first year due to illness and had three years away from study. I began working in the Renal Ward during this time. I found my calling, but personal dramas led to me leaving after six months. I got married, moved interstate and decided to go back to nursing 2 years later. My Enrolled Nursing training and renal experience put me in good stead. I walked into a job in the dialysis unit of Townsville General Hospital, worked there for 8 months then commenced in second year of a Bachelor of Nursing Science at James Cook University in 1992. I worked my way through uni, again gaining vital experience (and funds), graduating at the end of 1993.

I still work in Renal. I completed my Graduate Certificate in Nephrology Nursing at John Hunter Hospital in 1997 after returning to my home town after a 9 year absence. I worked in a variety of renal settings from in-centre dialysis to transplant and home therapies. I also toyed with university level teaching with a semester tutoring second year undergraduate students at a Sydney university. I moved with my family to the Central West of NSW 4 1/2 years ago to take up a renal outreach/peritoneal dialysis position and to have a tree-change. I have been encouraged by the number of registered nurses I work with that began as TAFE trained Enrolled Nurses. They have used the grounding and thirst for knowledge that TAFE training gave them to further their education and careers. I feel privileged to work with Enrolled Nurses who are passionate Enrolled Nurses and those who are passionately studying to become Registered Nurses. My colleagues and I reminisce about the transition from Enrolled to Registered nurse and I am amazed that so many of us began our journeys as TAFE TENs.

I am about to commence another journey. I am currently making the transition to nursing management, still in my much loved field of Nephrology, and will commence studying again next year. None of this would have happened if I had not been able to study through TAFE. It has been sad to witness the destruction of the TAFE system as we knew it. Affordable skill-based tertiary education for those who did not have the desire to study at university level. I would not be the nurse I am if I had gone straight to College/Uni. The real hands on experiences I gained in that 12 months of my training will never leave me.

Sincerely
Karen Fogo