

A friendly face

Companions strengthen community connections at The Wesley Hospital

For patients who may spend long periods in hospital or come from regional areas and receive few visitors, a visit from a friendly face is often just the boost they need.

That's why The Wesley Hospital in Brisbane launched its Companionship Program, which assigns volunteer visitors to brighten the days of patients who may be feeling lonely or in need of someone to have a social chat with or a walk through the hospital.

Maria Maloney, volunteer manager at The Wesley Hospital, said the program provides a link to the world outside the hospital.

"Companions provide the face of non-clinical social connections to patients whose main contact over long periods of time may be with surgeons, nurses and medical treatment professionals," she said.

"We take a multifaceted and holistic approach to patient care at The Wesley Hospital. The volunteer is part of the team.

"If a patient needs additional support, patients are referred to the pastoral care team and the hospital's nurse counselling service for professional assistance."

Maria said two to four companions visit patients throughout the hospital on weekdays, providing meal support, playing board games or cards, reading or having a friendly chat to help pass the time.

"When recruiting our companions, we look for positive individuals who establish good rapport with diverse people, respect privacy, maintain confidentiality and are resilient and genuinely caring," she said.

Debbie Knowles and Kaye Rumble are two such individuals. They have volunteered at the Wesley for the past six months. The Companionship Program allowed them to form a strong friendship.

Ms Knowles said she started volunteering because she had spare time and wanted to give back to the community.

"It's a wonderful feeling to know that you have made someone's day just by paying them a visit," she said.



Companionship Program volunteers Debbie Knowles (left) and Kaye Rumble from The Wesley Hospital

"Staff members also very appreciative. It's rewarding when the nurses say, 'Wow, they've really perked up after your visit,' and they tell us it makes their jobs a little bit easier too."

Ms Rumble said her connection to The Wesley came about after she underwent breast cancer treatment at the hospital, and the standard of care she received inspired her to volunteer.

"Personal contact can make a world of difference for patients who may be feeling isolated," she said.

"And when they feel happy it can help their recovery. One patient in particular, an older gentleman, was so grateful to have our company. We felt that we really made a difference to him and his family." PH

By Bonnie Harrison