

Andrew Butwell

Registered Nurse, Toowong Private Hospital



Where do you work, what is your role and how long have you been there?

I've worked at Toowong Private Hospital in Brisbane since 2006. I am a Registered Nurse credentialed with the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN). I have a range of roles at the hospital. I manage two community outreach programs namely the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) that is federally funded by Medicare Australia and the Assertive Community Treatment Program (ACT) that is funded by a range of Private Health Funds. I have a small case load of 10 patients I see in the community in the MHNIP.

I am the Administrators Delegate for the Queensland Mental Health Act 2000 (MHA2000) overseeing the administrative tasks for involuntary patients at the hospital. I also have a role with auditing controlled drugs and participate in a range of hospital committee meetings and Queensland Health working committees in relation to the MHA2000 on invitation. This keeps me quite challenged and busy.

You were recently named Queensland Father of the Year. Do you have one piece of advice for new fathers out there who are looking for inspiration?

The recent award has been somewhat surreal for me. I believe in being true to yourself and not pretending to be someone you're not. Life is too short to wonder about what you can or can't achieve. There is no harm in striving to achieve what ever goals or inspiration one might have. If you do not succeed initially, there is no shame in persevering or changing tack and trying something else.

You faced a life-changing challenge after you were assaulted in 2006. How did you overcome this adversity?

I was 39 years old, married with four children aged 8 - 15 years when I became a paraplegic in November 2006. I made a conscious decision

not to let this life changing experience dull my desire to live a fulfilling life. It was very important to me to provide a strong and stable home both financially, emotionally and socially for my children and wife (now separated) at the time. The support of family, friends and work colleagues was instrumental in my recovery. I decided to treat my rehabilitation in the PAH spinal unit like work and probably set a record for getting out in just over four months. I learnt a lot by merely observing those around me as well as practicing all the new skills I had no choice to learn so I could live as independent a life as possible.

What do your children think of their father being named the Queensland Father of the Year?

My children have been rather proud and slightly embarrassed to a degree. The three youngest children don't really remember me walking and have only known me as dad in a wheelchair. I have not done anything extraordinarily in their view, other than just being dad. They all had a bit of a laugh with me when I was initially nominated as we did not understand the importance of the award. It was not until I won the award that we realised what it meant to others in the community.

What do you hope other people can learn from your experience?

It would be nice to think that anyone who knows what my family and I have gone through since my accident can reflect on their own situation and draw some hope and inspiration when life may not be going that well for them. We will all meet challenges in some form in our lives. Some people are amazed by my ability to have met the challenges I have faced. I have often told people that I was lucky in terms of a spinal injury as I can at least use my arms. I maintain most of my independence and fortunately can do a lot more than some other people with more severe spinal injuries. Never give up I say! [PH](#)