



HUMANS OF THE ROYAL

Wendy Lewis

Indigenous Hospital Liaison Officer Wendy Lewis provides cultural support and advocacy to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and their families at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

Wendy was born and raised in Biggenden, a small town west of Bundaberg. Her grandparents were from Cherbourg, the Wakka Wakka tribe.

Bringing 34 years' nursing experience, Wendy moved to Brisbane with her husband in 2008 to live closer to their two sons.

She joined the RBWH Internal Medicine Day Unit and within 12 months was seconded to the Indigenous Hospital Liaison Officer (IHLO) role, which then became permanent.

As an IHLO, Wendy assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and their families to feel more at ease within the hospital system. She forms strong relationships with patients, providing support and often becoming part of their extended family.

"I enjoy being there for patients and families and advocating for them when they are dealing with serious medical issues. I make sure their needs are met and they feel comfortable with me and put their trust in me to be there for them and their families."

At any given time, Wendy supports as many as eight individual patients who are dealing with a range of serious health issues like cancer, chronic illness, drug or alcohol dependency, or homelessness.

For some patients, a trip to the Royal is extremely daunting, especially those who travel from small communities in the Tiwi Islands, Far North Queensland or regional towns. Dealing with a major and often unexpected health concern in unfamiliar surroundings is overwhelming and Wendy uses her experience to anticipate the needs of patients. "Sometimes you have to do the thinking for them," she said.

Wendy's guidance is also valuable for hospital staff in understanding cultural sensitivities that impact Indigenous patients, and she has seen an increased awareness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Unit during her time at RBWH. The close knit ATSIHU team includes IHLOs like Wendy, as well as the Indigenous Patient Journey Service.

For Wendy, her proudest moments are supporting patients through the hardest part of their health care journey and watching them leave hospital smiling.

