

Hush Foundation Kindness in Health Writing Prize announces winners - *In memory of doctor and author Kath O'Connor*

MEDIA RELEASE

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A story about a rural GP using a framework of kindness to challenge the notion of the 'difficult patient' has taken out first prize in the Hush Foundation's inaugural national Hush Kindness in Healthcare Writing Prize, in memory of the late author and doctor Kath O'Connor.

The judges were unanimous in their decision on the winning entry: 'A different kind of doctor' by retired academic and writer Jo Rendle from Canberra. The piece was a tribute to her late brother, a general practitioner.

The Hush Foundation's vision is healthcare which treats everyone with kindness - from patients to family members and carers, to staff.

The writing prize is a first for the charity which is widely known nationally and internationally for its innovative use of the arts - including music, theatre and literature alongside education, events and advocacy in its 25 year long mission to transform healthcare with kindness.

The team received an overwhelming number of powerful, beautifully written entries which, each in their own unique way, highlighted why and how kindness matters to us all when receiving or delivering healthcare.

"We have been overwhelmed, moved and humbled by the vulnerability, tenderness, warmth, creativity, humanity and, at times, humour in the entries received, and want to express our gratitude to all who took the time to share their stories. We worked our way through them with tears and delight." said Lucy Mayes, Engagement Manager at the Hush Foundation.

The topic resonated deeply with people from all facets of healthcare including patients, their family members, doctors, nurses, allied and support staff. Almost one hundred entries were received from all around Australia, with a few international entrants - an incredible response for an inaugural competition.

Accompanying her entry, Jo wrote: "Over my life, I have had the good fortune of experiencing many instances of kindness within the health profession – both as a patient and as a registered nurse in my previous life. It would be too difficult to list them all, but I know the details of each instance – who the doctors were, the nurses, the allied healthcare professionals. Kindness is such a powerful tool in enabling recovery and wellness within the healthcare system. In this piece I focused on my brother who worked as a GP in rural Queensland. Sadly, we lost him to cancer last year. He was an amazing doctor, full of kindness and compassion; a doctor who gave so much to his patients and to educating other GPs in rural settings who did not have access to large teaching hospitals."

New South Wales based writer Emma Ashmere was awarded runner up for her poignant personal story 'The Beautiful Ordinary'.

"This feels extremely special and a great honour to be a part of this heartfelt commemoration of Dr Kath O'Connor's life and legacy. I loved her book and was very moved by it," said Emma. Emma's entry was an account of her experience of supporting her mother through dementia and Parkinsons while experiencing her own journey through chronic and debilitating illness. In her entry, she wrote: "The many small acts of kindness shown towards my parents, and later to me, were islands of calmness, clarity, patience, recognition and replenishment – despite the sometimes hectic circumstances."

“Reading through the entries was a genuinely beautiful and life-affirming experience,” said judge Ruby Ashby-Orr, Commissioning Editor, Affirm Press. “Celebrations of kindness aren’t all that common, and reading so many of them – so beautifully written – was a joy as well as an honour. Thanks to the Hush team for creating this wonderful project, and congratulations to the award winners.” Fellow judge, author Inga Simpson shared: “It was a heartwarming – and at times heart-wrenching – experience to read these entries, and to finally select our deserved winners. Changing the world begins with kindness and imagination.”

Highly commended entries included: *Etymology* by Kristine Barnden, Obstetrician and environmental activist; *Leave Your Dignity at the Door* by Jennie Swain, writer, musician and educator; *The Pilbara Knicker Fund* by Steph Davis, GP and public health specialist; *The Ward Round* by Alexandra Fogg, GP Registrar; and *Moments of Kindness in a Regional Hospital* by Michael Leach, a clinical educator.

They were a combination of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. The winning and highly commended entries will be shared as part of the Hush Foundation’s #KindnessWorksHere celebrations from November 11 - 15, and a selection of 20 of the top entries will be published by the Hush Foundation as part of a new Kindness Anthology, to be illustrated by artists Trace Balle and Aunty Rochelle Patten.

To pre-order your copy or to register your interest in #KindnessWorksHere week, visit: www.hush.org.au.

The Hush Kindness in Healthcare writing prize was initiated and sponsored by Goldfields Medical Group, based in Castlemaine, Victoria, in memory of their late colleague author and GP Dr Kath O’Connor. Kath was a General Practitioner in Central Victoria and had just finished the second draft of her beautifully crafted novel, *Inheritance* (Affirm Press, 2023) when she died of Ovarian Cancer in 2019 at the age of 48.

The team wanted to honour Kath’s memory, her love of writing and her ethos of kindness in both her professional and personal life and saw obvious synergies in the work of the Hush Foundation whose mission is to transform healthcare cultures with kindness and the arts. Hush would like to thank Kath’s family, Goldfields Medical Group, judges Dr Hilton Koppe, Inga Simpson and Ruby Ashby-Orr and all who took the time and care to submit an entry.

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For more information, images and media enquiries please email info@hush.org.au