

We The People
Program 330 March 25, 2019
We the People 330 The Healing Power of the Orchid



Good Day to you. It's so nice to come across a lovely story now and again and the star today is the magnificent orchid. Whatever the occasion or mood, it's likely there's a colour of orchid to express it. Orchids bloom in every colour, from deep fuchsia to white to green, except for one and that's black. Although they're rare, there are even true blue orchids, and some that bloom in dual colours like lavender and pink or green and yellow. The ancient Aztecs were known to drink a mixture of vanilla orchid flowers and chocolate to give them strength. Vanilla is a species of orchid and vanilla extract comes from the orchid *Vanilla planifolia*. A beautiful and exotic flower by any measure and so it's fitting that a section in the Gold Coast University Hospital is named the Orchid Unit.

This is a dedicated specialised area within the hospital which provides mental health services to those 65 and over. I had never heard of this service until coincidentally a number of people mentioned it to me over time. They were all in accord that it is a well run, caring and compassionate health unit providing service to the many where mental anguish and disturbance is the villain. Seniors attend for a multitude of reasons and all are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. I spoke with the Nursing Unit Manager Mike Fishwick, who seemed like a candid and honest person to me. It was clear he is enormously proud of the Orchid unit and the wonderful staff and the facilities on offer. The Orchid Unit is based on 16 beds with about 93% occupancy so clearly there is a real need for this senior service. People from all walks of life and backgrounds find their way to the Orchid ward, some by choice and others under the Mental Health Services Act 2016. The reasons seniors need mental health services are many as with any other demographic but disruptions to life constitutes a major reason. For example folk retire and migrate away from their family to the Gold Coast, then one partner passes on leaving the other lost and seemingly alone. Depression sets in and a compassionate service is needed and the **Orchid flowers**. Many return to normal lives after proper care and this is testimony to the terrific people at the hospital. According to Mike the unit is well resourced with many different services and places significant importance on the calming influence of plants, sunlight and sounds like wind chimes or the call of birds. To this end the Orchid unit has a safe outdoor court yard full of tactile nature and the sounds of life. I know in my own life the scent from crushing the leaves of the lemon scented tea tree is a blessing from the trials of living. Sensory healing is well placed in the Orchid ward as it should be.

The Orchid unit at Gold Coast University Hospital represents a real contemporary approach to the art and science of healing and I was amazed to learn about how complete and effective their services are. Nearly by default they also provide a better understanding of the importance of mental health in general and especially with seniors and their staff's compassion is testimony to this. There are many fine nurses and staff and when I pressed Mike Fishwick for names he was quick to say choosing was near impossible. However purely as an indicative sample let's mention **Carole, Peggy, Martin, Fleur** and so many others as well and all should feel a great sense of pride and purpose in attending to the needs of seniors in their care in the Orchid Unit. It's the perfect name for healing in my view and people can access mental health support services on 1300642255 that's 1300642255 .

Until next time this is Kent Bayley

