

Historical beginnings

25 years at Middlemore Hospital – A Matron’s perspective. This article was published in ‘Middlemore Memories’ and was written by Beverly Barker.

In 1951 I was appointed second assistant Matron at Middlemore Hospital at the princely sum of 360 pounds a year.

In those days Middlemore was a 300-bed hospital – a nice size to administer. It was set in beautiful surroundings with native shrubbery encircling the grounds and a restful outlook over the adjacent Auckland Golf Club.

I was welcomed on my arrival by Miss Gladys Cleland, the first assistant Matron, and some of the senior nursing staff.



Beverly Barker discusses a patient’s care in the ward office. In those days nursing notes were held in a cardex, which were separate from the doctors notes in the trolley.

The following morning I presented myself to the Matron, Miss Hollan, who introduced me to the medical superintendent Dr John Colvin.

He welcomed me in a most courteous manner, which was the beginning of a cordial relationship with him for the next 12 years.

During the early 50’s Middlemore was predominantly an orthopaedic hospital. This could be a physically hard area to work in and back pain was a common ailment amongst the nursing staff. For this reason many nurses were discouraged from working at the hospital. Other reasons included poor transport, lack of entertainment and isolation from the city.

The hospital was initially staffed by nurses who trained elsewhere. Some came from the UK and were highly qualified. There were also student nurses and a considerable number of hospital aides. On occasions some of these junior staff members had to assume responsibilities beyond their actual training, especially the hospital aides. However, they rose to the occasion.

Middlemore Hospital set up a general nursing programme in 1948 with the first nurses graduating in the early 1950’s. In 1961 our own obstetric unit opened. Miss Marjorie Crabbe was appointed Sub-Matron in charge of the unit, complete with its own theatres, clinic areas and wards. She was an excellent manager, maintaining high standards of patient care and making sure the students received good training in the specialty. The unit meant that our nurses could receive all their training at the base hospital.

In 1970 a school of nursing was established for Middlemore nurses. It was located in the new household staff quarters over the railway line. No longer did our Middlemore nurses have to travel for their tuition.

Historical beginnings - continued

The Galbraith block opened in 1964. This housed ward 11 (ENT), ward 12 (intensive care unit) wards 14,15,16,18 and 20 (orthopaedic units) and wards 17,19 and 21 (surgical) as well as operating theatres, accident and emergency, clinic areas, x-ray department and medical administration.

There was also a staff canteen, post office and a conference room.

Auckland Hospital was rebuilt during the 1960's, which meant that some wards, and medical staff had to relocate from Auckland to Middlemore Hospital.

This helped fill up the extra wards and resulted in more nurses being trained at Middlemore. The staffing levels gradually built up, and the hospital gradually grew from a small cosy institution to one of 750 beds.

In 1966 the old Cornwall Hospital wards relocated to Middlemore, arriving in the dead of night. These were refurbished and used for geriatric wards 22 to 24.

The coronary care unit was constructed in 1974 adjacent to the medical wards. It soon proved a valuable asset for the care of coronary patients in the South Auckland area.

The South Auckland base of the district nursing service was established in an old recreation hut and was able to provide district nursing experience for our students.

Ward 9 was set up as a paraplegic ward, anticipating the opening of the Spinal Unit at Otara.

A new nurses' home was built and occupied in 1961. This helped accommodate the extra staff when the Galbraith and obstetrical buildings opened in the early 60's .

Recreational facilities in the home consisted of a well stocked library, canteen, hair salon, TV and piano and tennis courts. In 1967 a swimming pool was built. It meant nurses no longer had to flit in the night to the Kings College baths, which no doubt pleased the headmaster.

For the majority of student nurses Middlemore was a very special place. We all had a sense of belonging and working together as a team. I saw the staff (nursing, medical and ancillary services) strongly supportive of each other.

I suppose the community spirit which was forged in the initial country hospital stayed with us as we grew bigger.

This notion of Middlemore Hospital being a very special place was confirmed in my mind when graduate nurses returned, justifiably proud that they had trained at Middlemore.



**Household staff relax in the lounge.
This building later became the nurses' library.**