

Robyn Williams: Next we need to deal with the chilli scones, clearly. And to tell us about the chilli scones, we've got Janine Watts, who's from Western Australia Country Health Services. She's a health person turned very serious person. Would you tell us about the chilli scones? Thank you.

Who ate the chilli scones?

Janine Watts¹

¹Western Australia Country Health Service

Thanks for that, Robyn. I couldn't come to Queensland without talking about scones, and it's scones in my part of the world. And thanks very much to Gordon Gregory for your unwavering commitment to rural health. That is the most inspirational thing that I can think of to say about you. Firstly, I must pay my respects to the traditional owners of this land. And I feel very privileged to be invited to have almost the last word here - almost. That doesn't happen very often to me in my latest relationships. I have also been very thrilled to see so many people here that I know, and many people who have, up until now, just been another name on a journal article.

As you know, I'm a nurse. I've been a nurse for over 26 years with a real passion for the bush. The last Australian metro hospital I worked in was at St Vincent's in Melbourne, and that was in 1986, and it's fair to say I move around a bit. The flyer for this conference arrived in quite a poor state to my house. I actually still have it, and it had no less than three address changes and forwarding addresses, but it got here eventually in one piece. I found it in the letterbox in Merredin in Western Australia, which is where I'm currently living.

I commute to work around 160 kilometres down the road in a westerly direction to Northam each day. I might keep turning around to look at the screens every now and then, because I was talking to Frank and the IT boys, and they said if I didn't have a Powerpoint, they might put my face up either side. Please let me know if he does. Nice one, Frank. Okay. The other thing I've also been talking to Frank a little bit about - I can really pick on you now - I really wanted to see that big butterfly fly off. I reckon that would have been really cool. Can't do that? But when I'm talking about the butterfly thing, in the flyer, as everybody found out, we had this little thing that we had to fold and make into a butterfly. Now, I just thought I'd bring this with me, because it's quite interesting. These are some of my earlier attempts at the butterfly, and I got all kinds of shapes out of it. I got cubes, and I got all kinds of different squares, and then I realised that the instructions were actually - when you get to part 7 of the instructions, they're actually wrong, and this is what happened next - and I'll just show you, because I did keep these pieces and I'm really sorry, Gordon, but this is what we ended up with in our house, and a lot of arguments about that.

I actually thought that this was probably the NRHA having games with me again, and I'm usually quite good at origami, but this simple task became somewhat overheated, and I think maybe what you've tried to do is, you're getting tricky again and this - and he's actually given us a metaphor for rural health. It's always colourful; it's always interesting. The rules often don't apply. Often, it's a challenge. Sometimes it's frustrating, and sometimes it's rewarding, and sometimes you get butterflies and sometimes you get squares.

Now, nursing can really take you places. We've had an advertising campaign in the west saying just that at the moment. I don't relate much to the ad. It shows a male cartoon nurse, fairly one-dimensional, rapidly scaling a ladder surrounded by the memorabilia of his happy patients. I'm not much of a ladder climber, more of a snakes and ladder player, actually, especially the snake bit. I probably don't stay long enough in any one place. Seriously, I'd like to see Will Anderson do a makeover on health advertising on The Gruen

Transfer. If we don't get this right pretty soon, our professions will not engage the next generation's interest, nor recognise the contributions of the ones that came before us.

Now, I've found - and here's a very cautionary tale - you have to be careful about who's in the audience at an NRHA conference. In Canberra in 2001, I was coerced into debating rural health as a career. This became the start of my ventures into narrative comedy, and what I term "quirkiness". I was rather shocked to find yesterday that Frank and the IT guys still have footage of this moment and, Frank, that's not an invitation. I'm a lot younger in the footage he has, and I still have all my teeth.

Anyway, after this debate, later in the exhibition hall I met a contingent of staff from Cobden, Victoria, where I was born in nineteen sixty - let's just say some time before the start of the '70s - and one of these people, now quite a bit older than when I'd last had contact with her - before I actually had teeth - approached me to tell me that she'd been the midwife attending to my mother when I was born. She had some vivid memories, which she shared - imagine that - way too much information already. Apparently, I was a little odd right from the very start. Yes. I have a plane to catch, and I know that you're waiting for the main act today, so I will skip.

One of the things about humour is that it allows you to acknowledge your humanness, and amongst this humanness you're right to make the odd mistake, to get the wrong end of the stick sometimes, to make a wrong choice under pressure or stress, to occasionally bark when you're supposed to purr, and you begin to look at your human errors and look at them from another perspective. You realistically acknowledge the contribution poor skills, bad policy, outdated equipment, under-resourced environments, and increasingly complex workloads can have to your professional competency, and you work positively to continually improve. Recent commitment to spreading the Human Error In Patient Safety program is well established in Queensland already. This multidisciplinary program is usually delivered in two-day workshops, and changes perceptions and teams in unimaginable ways.

Has anybody in the room done HEIPS training? Yes? No one from Queensland? Yes? Good. Commitment to funding this is a huge gamble in any economic climate, and I guess the fact that WA have recently decided to spread this across the bush has renewed my faith in the leadership of WA Country Health Service, and I won't leave them just yet, and I wasn't paid in any way to say this.

Aside from comedy, using popular culture to provoke an emotional reaction in staff is another powerful way of engaging an audience. I believe we totally under-estimate the power of media and digital communication, to our peril. The recent boom in online video through YouTube, and the millions of photos uploaded through services like Flickr show how the internet is morphing into a broadcasting as well as a text-based publishing environment. Text services like Twitter are just the latest in a long and never-ending line of improvements in the technical process of communication.

In reality, we are still unable to supply adequate computer access, IT training and bandwidth to every rural and remote nurse. Not correcting this gap rapidly will have a profound effect on staff retention. I acknowledge the work presented to us yesterday from NEHTA. My question is, how soon can you get this sorted? We are running out of time and, no, we're not quite there yet either.

I work in a regional office in Northam, and the people in my office are very fashionable, and I've found that you have to wear high heels at this office, and a lot of them are of the Y Generation variety. I had been asked - and I was actually requested - to make some morning tea one morning, and somebody mentioned that I was very good at making scones. Someone had been at a bake-off that I'd done in the north, and so I decided that I would make four different kinds of chilli scones, of date scones, and herb scones, and pumpkin scones, because I learnt that from a wonderful book by Martha Gardener, and it was actually Flo Bjelke-Petersen's recipe. Anyway, I noticed during the morning tea that the chilli scones

disappeared very rapidly, and our 16 year old business trainee, who's the most quiet person you could ever see, never speaks, is like a mouse, asked me if there were any more chilli scones. And it finally dawned on me: chilli is the new black. I can spice up old favourites and genuine talents with micro trends.

On 12 May, International Nurses Day, the International Council of Nurses acknowledged the importance of nursing innovation against a background of constant change. The ICN recognised that nursing's contribution to health care innovation is seldom recognised, publicised or shared amongst nursing in the wider public. Novel solutions by nurses represent a vital element in efforts to address current and future global challenges. There is a repository for innovations in nursing being set up for all to access. Now you're talking.

So the big message is, the secret to getting and keeping staff across all generations is to add chilli, if that's what they want. Appeal to their micro trends and needs with courage and playfulness. Experiment with the young, and acknowledge their IT skills. Text them when they do something amazing. Teach the baby boomers how to be frivolous, to relax and play again. Recognise innovation, develop leaders. Share ideas. Be human. If you make mistakes and you're learning, don't let it drag you down. Look for the bright side. There's a chance to make an improvement somewhere and move on. And don't be afraid to let the tail wag the dog sometimes. Thank you.

Presenter

Janine Watts grew up in small town, rural Victoria, in the 1960s. After training as a nurse in Ballarat, eventually finding her way to rural and remote practice in the Western Australian goldfields in the late 80s, she began travelling the world, settling back in Western Australia in the late 1990s.



On returning to Australia, Janine rapidly established a reputation for comedic interpretation of life events, using the comic stand-up medium to explain personal and professional tragedy. Using humour to engage staff in clinical improvement and best practice has been a constant feature of her life and work as a remote area nurse, nurse manager, director of nursing and latterly coordinator of quality and safety.

Janine is a keen metal detector and gold hunter and learnt to fly light aircraft in England. Aerial views of the Pilbara, as seen from a small plane have been a popular feature of Janine's recent art work. Janine won awards in the prestigious Port Hedland Art Awards in both 2005 and 2006 with works based on Pilbara lizards and the iconic Pilbara landscape.

During this period Janine produced groundbreaking research based on the effect of fly-in/fly-out work practices on family and personal lives, and the effect of this phenomenon on remote community sustainability.

Janine has represented nurses in national organisations such as CRANA and the College of Emergency Nursing Australasia over the years, and has been involved in many strategic planning and policy change initiatives.

Being the all around consummate artiste, and no slouch in the kitchen, thanks to a lifetime of CWA and ladies hospital auxiliary advice, Janine won the hospital scone bake-off and has recently had an article accepted for publication with a four-wheel drive magazine, describing cooking for four blokes on the iconic Canning Stock Route.

Currently Janine is working in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australian Country Health Service in the field of clinical practice improvement. Her role delivers assistance and support to numerous rural and remote health delivery sites, including 24 small hospitals, three integrated district health services, and numerous remote health centres.

