MEDIA RELEASE

Trip to mental health nurse saves life

Three years ago, a trip to see a psychiatric triage nurse saved the life of speech writer and political strategist Lieutenant Colonel Cate McGregor.

Then Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm McGregor, and working in the Australian Defence Force, Lt Col McGregor felt despondent.

“I felt low level anxiety and depression, and had been struggling on despite it, however, it did not seem to be getting any better so I resolved to seek specialist help”, said Lt Col McGregor.

“Initially I went to the mental health nurse at Duntroon hospital. She was really professional, as well as empathic. I thought it was some version of the mid-life crisis and discussed trying therapy – though without much optimism. However, she matched me with just the right therapist and that process became the most amazing and fulfilling journey that I have ever undertaken”, Lt Col McGregor said.

It was the psychiatric triage nurse who referred the Lt Col to a psychologist, leading to the commencement of gender transition.

“I was in therapy for over a year before I divulged my history of gender dysphoria. Once I actually acknowledged it, it seemed to gather intensity. My therapist never betrayed a preference for any particular outcome, but helped me to arrive at the decision that I was comfortable with. She and that nurse saved my life. Indeed, they helped me be re-born”, said Lt Col McGregor.

“It is a real honour to attend a gathering of mental health professionals to hopefully put something back to a profession from which I have received so much. In addition to discussing that experience I hope that I can demonstrate that trans-people do not necessarily conform to a stereotype”, Lt Col McGregor said.

“Since exploring this issue I have been amazed that many natal males like I was cultivate hyper-masculine identities. Some time ago this seemed to confuse some professionals, though I am heartened to think this is no longer the case”, said Lt Col McGregor.

Lt Col McGregor will be discussing the important part mental health nurses and psychologists have played in her transition from male to female during her keynote presentation at the 39th International Mental Health Nursing Conference, being held in Perth this week.

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