

# Emily Palhares

Emily graduated from Catholic College in 2014.

She completed the Bachelor of Nursing at Charles Sturt University and now works as Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Nurse in Sydney.



## What inspired you to pursue a course and career in your chosen field?

I have always been interested in nursing since I was in high school. I used to watch the Good Friday appeal on the TV at the Royal Children's hospital and I always said I wanted to be a neonatal nurse. Although I don't currently work as a neonatal nurse I still do have an interest in that for the future. I am currently working as a Paediatric cardiac nurse.

## What subjects at school helped you the most with your university subjects, and how?

**Health and Human Development:** I found Health and Human Development important as it gave me a starting point and I was actually interested in the topics because it was relevant in my field of interest.

**Biology:** I have now found biology would have been helpful if I had done that because at university you have to do a pathophysiology subject and I was starting from scratch. Other nurses had previously done biology at high school where I never did so I struggled with that subject.

## What did you do during school to research your career field?

I attended many open days and I had researched different qualifications about neonatal nursing and how I could get into the course. I also met with the careers advisor (Sandie) frequently. I also knew of some people who were working in the

nursing field and I had spoken to them about the best pathway to get into neonatal nursing.

### **What was studying your course at uni like? (e.g., the placements, meeting like-minded people, labs)**

I found university very different than school. I actually enjoyed it more although found it hard. At school I did not pay attention and usually had others to help or ask questions whereas university is very much adult learning, so you have to find all the answers yourself.

Nursing was tough, mentally because I was learning so much and doing practical components that I struggled linking the theory to practice. Once I was on placements, I found I learnt a lot more. Everything just started to make more sense. I ended up really grasping extra learning and taking advantage of every single learning opportunity whilst I was on placements.

I did struggle with the university subjects as all of them were adult based nursing, which I understand you need to know but I knew from the beginning I did not want to do adult nursing - I wanted to work with babies and children at university. So, I never really was satisfied with the content because I craved to learn more about Paediatrics rather than adults.

### **Describe a typical day at work**

As it turns out I didn't get placed in a neonatal unit and I gained a job in paediatric cardiology. I am so grateful now that I started where I did and not straight into neonatal nursing. The nature of my work means the majority of patients are long term.

I usually get a handover from the previous nurse then I plan out my shift and that includes medications, observations, updating the parents and following up any tests that are needed.

Paediatrics is very different to nursing adults because you don't just have the child you have the parents so most of the time you're working in partnership with the family and their child. Each day is different and exciting, no two days are the same.

## **What do you love about your job?**

I love my job and could not see myself doing anything different. I love that I'm making a difference in a child's life as well as their families. I enjoy that looking after babies and children you have to keep things fun and playful, so often I'm using toys and creating different fun ways to get different tasks done.

I love the relationships you create with children and the parents. You never forget them or the families. There's something humbling about caring for sick children that makes me feel like I'm doing something great for the world.

## **What should students know about your field of work that they won't read in a course guide?**

It can be very overwhelming. Looking after tiny babies and children that are critically ill can be a tough gig. Mentally and emotionally you can take a lot of work home with you and it can be hard to switch off.

It's very emotional work and sometimes it can be challenging especially when it comes to death and palliation of a child you have looked after for a long time. You have to realize paediatric nursing is not all about cuddling babies, and painting and laughing and pretty coloured scrub uniforms.

I to was naïve to all of this and although it crossed my mind I have only recently learnt how tough emotionally it can be. I still wouldn't change it for the world. I go to work everyday so excited and I have never felt so fulfilled in my life but I think it is important to be fully aware of what the job entails.

Ask lots of questions about the job and what you might be fearful of because chances are you might come across it in the job.