

Women in Cardiology

Dr Julee McDonagh, Registered Nurse and Lecturer, University of Newcastle School of Nursing and Midwifery. Proud descendant of the Cabrogal Clan of the Dharug First Nations people.



I am an experienced cardiovascular nurse who has recently joined the CSANZ Cardiovascular Nursing Council Executive committee. I first discovered my love of cardiology while working as a nursing student in a coronary care unit in a regional NSW hospital. I was fascinated with all things cardiac and made my mind up back then to pursue a career in cardiac nursing.

After graduating with my Bachelor of Nursing in 2009, I spent two years working at Manly Hospital, before I saw a job advertised in the coronary care unit at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney. I applied and thankfully got the job. Working at St Vincent's opened my eyes to advanced heart failure management and gave me first-hand experience caring for a range of different people requiring complex intervention, including LVADs and heart transplantation.

In 2014, I moved into a clinical research role, working on a large heart failure trial, which started the next phase of my cardiology career and gave me a passion for research. After 12-months in my clinical research role, I enrolled in my PhD undertaking a project focusing on frailty assessment in people with heart failure at St Vincent's Hospital.

Making the shift from clinical nursing to higher degree research is not an easy pathway. There are limited support systems in place for experienced nurses wishing to undertake higher degree research. It is difficult to receive a scholarship to undertake PhD studies when you don't come through the traditional honours to PhD pathway. Initially I continued to work clinically on the weekends and evenings to financially support myself. I was lucky to later be awarded funding from the NSW Ministry of Health PhD scholarship program and the University of Technology, Sydney, which allowed me to complete my studies.

It took me 6 years to finish my PhD thesis, including taking 12 months of maternity leave to have my first child, which added an extra layer of complexity to my completion goal, and showed me what family/work/life balance really was! Nevertheless, on 31st March 2021, I finally pressed the send button and submitted my thesis. I was already working in a full-time academic role at this stage at the University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus, so after my thesis submission, I was straight back into my teaching and research commitments. My PhD was awarded in November last year.

I have recently joined the CSANZ Cardiovascular Nursing Council Executive committee. I am looking forward to working with the Executive to promote and advocate for the important role cardiovascular nurses play in CSANZ and the wider community and I am extremely honoured to be one of two First Nations representatives on the Council Executive.

My hope for the future is that there are more support systems put in place for experienced nurses wishing to undertake and lead cardiovascular research. Nurses have a wide variety of highly specialised clinical and research skills and are brilliant patient/consumer advocates, and we deserve a seat at the table.

Individually, I look forward to continuing my program of research focusing on frailty and multimorbidity in people with cardiovascular disease. I am also committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience disproportionate rates of cardiovascular disease.

In the short term, I am excited to be able to attend the CSANZ annual meeting in August, my first face-to-face meeting since 2018!
