



Gold Coast Health Executive Corner

Board Chair's Blog

Professor Cindy Shannon AM

Farewell to Professor Judy Searle

It is with great regret that I announce that Professor Judy Searle, Board Director, has decided to step down from the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service Board, following an exceptional term of service across almost eight years. For six of those years, she was Chair of the Board's Safety, Quality and Clinician Engagement (SQCE) Committee, and of course Judy has also served with distinction as Deputy Chair of our Board.

Many of you will have had the pleasure of meeting Judy during that time, and it's an understatement to classify her contribution to the Board as of the highest calibre.

Those who know Judy well may be aware that she has now relocated permanently to Adelaide, and was recently appointed by the South Australian Minister for Health to the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network (NALHN) as Board Chair. As they say, our loss is their gain, and Directors will certainly miss Judy around our Gold Coast Health Board table.

While Judy's list of achievements while on the Board is long, there are a couple of things I'd like to particularly highlight, starting with Judy's relentless focus on patient safety. As Chair of our Board SQCE Committee, it was Judy who ensured every meeting started with the clinician voice; introducing a 30-minute standing agenda item to hear a Patient Story directly from a clinician (or a team of clinicians). Herself an obstetrician/gynaecologist, Judy has diligently ensured every item discussed was considered through a lens of patient safety and quality. Under Judy's leadership of SQCE, Gold Coast Health's reputation for good safety and quality governance has gone from strength to strength. Only recently was our SQCE Committee acknowledged by the Department of Health as an exemplar governance committee worthy of emulation across the country.

Judy has been involved in critically important accreditation processes while at Gold Coast Health, most recently in 2022. At the end of that accreditation visit the reviewers were effusive about the

strong commitment by GCHHS to safety and quality. Some of the most memorable comments from the reviewers included *“some of the practices at Gold Coast Health are world class”* and the lead reviewer’s comment that she *“would be more than happy to have her family members treated at our hospital”*, as she knew they would be provided with the safest and highest quality of care.

While Judy would be the first to pay tribute to our frontline staff for this, it’s also true to say that culture starts at the top. With a calm and collected leadership style, Judy has fostered a spirit of openness and transparency between the Executive and the Board one only sees in organisations willing to own its errors and learn from them. She recognises health is a human endeavour; she never blames; she always seeks to understand; she sets high standards yet is generous to those who show courage and acknowledge failings. These are hallmarks of Judy that I will seek to continue, as I Chair the SQCE Committee moving forward.

As difficult as the task may be, the Board will seek to fill the vacancy Judy’s departure creates on the Board, with an announcement following in due course.

I'm sure I speak for all Board Directors and the Executive Leadership Team alike when I say we will miss Judy's unique blend of clinical expertise, academic rigour, sharp wit, political insight, and all-round governance nous. Gold Coast Health has benefited enormously from her service; please join me in thanking her.