

Jennifer's story

I used to go to the diabetic clinic, but every time you went you always seen a different doctor. It was hard with the doctor... Seeing a different doctor and constantly repeating yourself every time you seen a doctor. Then something happened, there was a bit of a shake up there... And Dr B she started being the diabetic doctor. And that's when things changed with me there.

She pulled us all in and did a Care Plan. And that was really good because, like, it felt really good that someone took the time out and sat with us. And we went through everything, the way we were looking after ourself – eating, drinking, smoking – and she gathered all our test results and put it in a graph and showed us.

She got everything, what we were doing and what we are aiming for. It was quite surprising, first time ever got my belly measured [laugh], and I thought, 'Wow, getting the works here.' And the aim was to reduce your belly size and do all this.

So having a doctor that, you know, for her to do that she would have had to be happy to go along and say, 'Well okay, I'll fix them all up.'

So we had all that and I was happy, because then we went over everything that was wrong with me... We went through and reorganised my medication. She said, 'Oh no, we'll update this diabetic tablet... No, no we'll check that...' And just went through the whole thing.

She's very good because she won't see you if you don't do your three monthly blood checks. Very strict, but very good. Like, 'Don't come to me unless you've done all that.' Very firm. 'No, no. Go along, go and get those tests. Come back, I'll see you.' [Laugh].

That was really good, everyone who hasn't done their tests go, 'Ooh, we better go and do it.' And away they go.

And they know now that she's like, 'I can't work with you. You've been told. You got to do your test.'

She printed it all out, so I've got it in a file now. So if I go anywhere, travel anywhere, I've got my medical file. And if I'm sick, I'll go and show whichever medical place I'm in, or hospital, I show them that. And they can read up and know everything about me and what's going on with me and I like that, I got very happy about that.

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Then she's, 'What about your smoking?'

I said, 'Oh, can't give it up. I'm too stressed. I look after all the grandchildren.' And, you know, most Aboriginal grandparents are.

I thought, 'Oh, no. Can't give up smoking and this and that.' And she started on me, you know, about it's all to do within your... In your head. And I said, 'No, I can't do it.' I was smoking pretty badly.

And she said, 'Well, when you're ready.'

So every time I went back, we did a catch up on the Care Plan, she said, 'How are you going with the smoking? Have you cut down?'

I said, 'Really, for a while I been thinking of stopping smoking.'

And she said, 'Well, you know, I'm not into giving you any drugs or anything. You got to do it by yourself.'

I said 'I can't do it by myself, I need help.'

'No, no,' she said. 'You can do it.'

I said, 'No I can't.'

Then my other half started getting sick and I said, 'Come on, you haven't been in to do your Care Plan and all that.' So I dragged him in. He had to do some tests and this and that, and I said, 'He won't go and do the test. He won't do anything. He's drinking too much. He's doing all this and that...'

And then he said, 'Oh, no. But she's doing too much smoking and she's doing too much this and that.'

So the doctor ended up being in the middle. And when you go to the diabetic clinic, a lot of the Aboriginal old couples all go in together. And they all go in at the same time and all that, you know. And sometimes all the family does. If I go in there, I take all the grandchildren. I need to see the doctor and we all go in. And some of the new doctors are not used to it and they go, 'Um, um...' I said, 'Oh, this is Aboriginal Medical Centre.' And they sitting there and there's only an appointment for one person [laugh] but we're all squeezing there.

So anyway... He said, 'She needs something to give up smoking.' He said, 'What about those chem sticks?'

She said, 'Oh, she don't need.'

He said, 'Yes, she does. She needs something.'

So she said, 'Okay then. You come, make an appointment, come back in. I will see Wayne,

you can go out now. I'll just talk to Wayne.'

And I said, 'Okay then.' Went out.

And when I come back in she said, 'Well, I have to give you some counselling first, before you even attempt that.'

I said, 'Fine.'

She said, 'Do you really wanna give up smoking?'

I said, 'Yes.'

She said, 'When is the worst time you smoke?'

I said, 'Uh... in the morning. I get up while everyone's sleeping and make a cup of tea and I'm puffing away and having that cup of tea. And that's my time.'

She said, 'Okay. So you can just get a mug and put on it "No Smoking". And when you get up in the morning, you grab that cup of tea, sit out in the yard, and you got your "No Smoking" cup. Okay? And we'll write down what triggers you, what triggers you off, all your triggers. And then we'll write down what to do for those triggers.'

That sound alright, so I said, 'Well, in the morning I'm stressed before I get up. I'm stressed about the beginning of the day, so I get up and I just...'

So she said, 'Okay, well when you get up try not to have your cup of tea straight away, because that will stop you from smoking.'

So I did that. And she said, 'Right, pick a date you're gonna give up.'

I said, 'Right, I'm gonna give up on the 19th...' Something last year, I remember it was the 19th. I gave the date to her.

She said, 'Right.' Rang up, got permission for the chem sticks.

I went down and got it. Come home out of there. Showed everybody. I'm giving up smoking on the 19th, it's a Monday, my last smoke will be a Sunday.

The kids... They helped me design the mug and, 'Right, Nanna. That's your "No Smoking" ...' Everybody got in on the act [laugh].

Before I went to bed Sunday night, I said, 'Here, who wants the smokes? Because that's it now, I've had my last smoke. When I get up in the morning, I'm not touching another smoke.'

I got up in the morning and I took the tablet but I didn't make myself a cup of tea, I thought I'd drink water. And then I walked around, did this and that, and then got that cup and had

something. And I went all day without a smoke, went to bed and I thought, 'Wow, and everybody is waiting for me to light up.'

I got up the next morning, took my tablet, the chem sticks. A bit later had something to eat and took me other medication. Waited till later. I didn't have a cup of tea straight away, I waited till later, grabbed the "No Smoking" mug. And I went like that for a week. And I said, 'Jesus. A week and I haven't had a smoke!'

I got so excited and proud of myself, and at that moment I realised that a good doctor can make a difference in a person's life. Because she took the time to go through everything, to help me, and here I am. Went a week without smoking!

I just couldn't believe it. I was so happy and that was the happiest thing I ever did... Having a doctor in my life that helped me to get through all those obstacles.

And then I took them for four weeks and I had to go back and see her, and then she gave me another lot and they were a bit stronger than the first lot. And she said, 'Right, you on the second stage, you take these for eight weeks.'

And so away I went.

At the time, I said to my other half, 'Give up drinking.' And he wouldn't give up drinking. So the deal was, you know, you give up drinking, I give up smoking. And he did. And that was Dr B too. So now we don't smoke... I don't smoke, he doesn't drink. We are a lot healthier and our life is a lot better.

It's going on for nearly 12 months, a year, since I've stopped smoking. And I went and seen her the other day and she said, 'Oh, I need to hug you, because you know you're one of my successes, you're still not smoking.'

And I said, 'No, I'm glad that you've helped me because I'm never gonna touch it again and I just think you're excellent.'

I told her that, and she said, 'What?'

I said, 'I just think you are so excellent, you have really made a difference in my life, so I am pretty happy.'

And they go, the rest of the family, go, 'Oh, did religion get you? Church get you?'

And I said, 'What do you mean?'

'Well, you stopped smoking and drinking. Did the Lord..?'

I said, 'No, a good doctor! No. A good doctor. Medical reasons, and a good doctor.'

They say, 'No, you gone back to church, you gone to church.'

Every time Aboriginal people give up drinking or smoking, the rest of the community go, 'Oh gee, religion got you. You turned Christian. Those Jehovah Witnesses got you.' [Laugh].

And you say, 'No, a doctor helped me through all this. A doctor helped ease my fears, showed me how these things can get done.'

So, I am so happy for that. So happy to have that diabetic clinic.

When we were seeing the different doctors it was like, oh yeah, in and out. That doctor would growl and say, you know, 'Don't smoke.' And we go, 'Yeah, okay...who cares.' You know? Come back tomorrow and I'll see another doctor.

I would be repeating myself and that doctor would be repeating themselves and it was continuous. And a lot of the Aboriginal patients go, 'We're always seeing a different doctor.' But I've seen a lot of other patients that just got that one diabetic doctor that it does make a lot of difference.

Dr B

Sometimes you go in there and there's that many people, because she's so good at communicating with everybody and she knows how to talk.... But she'll also tell you how it is, you know.

I was supposed to have my heart done, you know, cardiograph, eco. I went over for a holiday and I couldn't get in. So I went back and she said, 'Did you go?'

And I said, 'Look, I couldn't get in. It was full till I come back.'

She said, 'Well don't come in here and see me. You make that appointment and you go and see that before you come back in and see me... Don't come and see me unless that's done. Then I can look at your results.'

My sister was huge and she's lost her stomach ever since she started measuring it. And it's dropped from 126 down to 113. So it takes a very good doctor.

And everyone says, 'Oh, oh, Dr B is always growling.'

And she does, because she's been there for that long she knows how to deal. But, you know, I suppose if you want results you got to put that effort in. And yes, a lot of people I see are looking really well besides us and besides me.

And if your weight is going this way and that way on the graph, she shows you the graph and how it works. She shows you the test results and what is what. She gets a piece of paper and do a diagram.

The other day, she did a diagram for me yesterday actually, I was in there. I had rheumatic fever, so I had to get the heart checked, had to get me kidney, had to go to go down to the specialist two weeks ago at [hospital] to see the Rheumatologist. The doctor made me do that much tests, coz I swelled up.

And they tell me that's more common in Aboriginal families, Aboriginal people. Rheumatic fever.

My feet swelled up. I swelled up. And I couldn't move for two days. And after the third day I kind of come good, but I didn't go to... I had no waterworks for two days. And she told me my kidneys had shut down for two days. She said I'm lucky to be alive. She jumped up and said, 'Don't lay in bed again! Get up to the hospital. You could of died!' She said, 'Right, we are doing this and this.'

So I went through it all and I'm very lucky that it didn't affect my kidney or my heart. They're going good. And just... All my joints... I was walking like I needed one of those walking sticks or A-frame. So I'm on my medication now.

I got a surprise because he [the Rheumatologist] touched me and I screamed and yelled. And he said, 'I don't think you got any vitamin D.' And I'm looking at him like... But he's a specialist, anyway. And he said, 'Go and do blood tests. When you get home, get some vitamin D and wait a week, and come back.'

No vitamin D in my body... And I said, 'I sit in the sun all day.'

They said, 'No, coz you're dark skinned the sun is hard to penetrate.'

I'm recovering now and I'm just happy and I said to her [Dr B], 'Well, you know what is the cause?'

'Because you get sore throats constantly.' And she said it doesn't happen in a European family home anymore, because they don't overcrowd like an Aboriginal family. It's all about overcrowding, too many... Well I did have, I had 10 grannies, 12 grannies here at the time, and it hit me like a tonne of bricks.

And that's what she told me. Said, 'I don't want to be rude, but that's it. Doesn't happen in a European community or home anymore because there's no overcrowding.' She told me it's just got to be me and Wayne in a little small house.

I said, 'Okay.' [Laugh].

I think a lot of Aboriginal people think that you're... They just put up a wall anyway. And you may notice, they just put that wall up, they just say, 'Oh, we're gonna get treated badly so we're not gonna...' And sometimes they don't answer you properly, they don't come out with what's really happening with them. They'll just only let you know a bit. So you really have to build up that friendship with them. It takes a while, you know. They go, 'That woman, she alright...' After a while.

We all got this thing of, we all go to hospital and never come out. We go in one door and we go out the other door. A lot don't speak as good as I do. A lot just... A lot are very angry too. But if you just sit down and talk, talk to them first, and then get around to it... Get around to it.

I can go to a doctor and I'll go in and just tell him what I want to know, this and this, but I won't tell him the rest. With Dr B, we just went in there and told her a bit, and then slowly, next time we went in we just told her a bit more, and then we told a bit more, and we built that rapport up.

When you start slowly building that up and then they start being more free.

I've seen a few doctors, but I've held back on a lot of stuff. I've never been straight out honest. I'd go, 'Oh yes, smoke, just smoke.' I'd answer them back just like that, 'Oh yeah, have a few drinks, yeah. Yeah.' And then leave it at that.

But when you got a good doctor you say, 'Yes, I did... I've drunk too much. I drunk till I was senseless. I smoke too much and I'm not looking after myself.'

An Aboriginal person will pick up if you know a bit about us. Knowing a bit about us... We can say, oh yeah, we kind of sense that you know a bit about us and which is... Like with any nationality I suppose.

Seeing something, you know... You hear all the bad things, but seeing something good...

I said to Dr B, 'Quite a few of us drink.'

She said, 'Not really. I've been in this community and there's a lot of non-drinking Aboriginal people. So don't...'

She mixes. She comes to our NAIDOC ball. She gets a good drink [laugh].

I said to her, 'I've been praising you up.'

She nearly choked up and she said, 'What?'

I said, 'You know, because you came into my life and made a difference. Because you stopped and you really listened to me and you understood me.'