



Healing program wins recognition

By Meredith Clisby

A PROGRAM that helps women deal with the loss of their hair after chemotherapy has won an ACT Quality in Healthcare Award.

Headsup@Bruce provides fashionable and affordable headwear to women dealing with the stress of a traumatising side-effect of their treatment.

Sue Owen came up with the idea after she was an outpatient herself at the Zita Mary Clinic following breast cancer surgery in 2005.

She realised her struggle to find appropriate headwear was the same for many other women so she decided to start the service with the support of the clinic.

Her successful partnership with Calvary Hospital has culminated in a 2011 Quality in Healthcare Award for consumer participation.

"It's humbling to be put forward, to have been recognised as supporting people and improving self-esteem of women with hair loss," Ms Owen said.

She said the award was significant because it showed recognition of the importance of self-esteem in the recovery experience.

Ms Owen said the loss of hair can be a very traumatic experience for women and for some is more confronting than undergoing chemotherapy.

"What the award has given us is the ability to have more publicity and recognition ... we are growing and growing with more people knowing where we are and what we do," she said.

Ms Owen and her 12 volunteers began HeadsupAustralia in November 2010 with the plan to provide seed

funding to other groups wanting to start similar services.

Headsup@Bruce received seed funding from support-service Bosom Buddies to begin the not-for-profit business.

Ms Owen said training would also be an important component of the process. Empathy was the crucial ingredient of a successful operation.

She said the focus next year would be on visiting other communities interested in providing a similar service.

Headsup will also begin offering a small selection of headwear for men.

Ms Owen said while most men did not consider hair their "crowning glory", many of them still experienced the same loss of self-esteem after going through medical treatment.

Calvary chief executive Ray Dennis congratulated Headsup@Calvary for the award and said it was a timely reminder for the health industry that healing was not just a clinical process.

"The non-clinical needs of cancer patients were for a long time either not considered or treated as a low priority," he said.

"However it is becoming more and more obvious that personal self-esteem has a critical role to play in the physical and emotional recovery of cancer patients."

■ Headsup@Bruce is open Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 3pm and is located in the Lewisham building at Calvary Hospital.

For more information, visit www.headsup.net.au or phone 6201 6579.



ACT Quality in Healthcare award winner Sue Owen tries a hat on volunteer Debbie Whitfield.
Picture: Elesa Lee