

Gold Coast 5th Annual Palliative Care Conference 2026

“The Art and Science of Living Well While Dying Well”

Friday 12th June - Presenter Biographies



**Venerable Tsultrim (Carla Pearse), Spiritual Care Practitioner/Counsellor
*Spirituality***

Tsultrim has been a student of Buddhism since 1998 and was ordained in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition in 2009 at Chenrezig Institute on the Sunshine Coast.

She has spent time in India and Nepal over several years, taking teachings across the main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, doing numerous retreats and pilgrimages and leading courses and workshops on Buddhism, mindfulness and meditation in India, Nepal and Australia.

Tsultrim's working history includes Counselling for over 20 years; General Manager of Lifeline in Caboolture for almost 7 years; CEO of Community Action for the Prevention of Suicide (CAPS) now Suicide Prevention Pathways for 6 years; and facilitated suicide prevention training for many years. Tsultrim has been a Spiritual Care Practitioner at Karuna Hospice for the past 4 years. Tsultrim has Undergraduate degrees in Counselling and Social Policy and a Master Degree of International Studies, with a major in peace and conflict resolution. She has a strong conviction in the practice and benefits of mindfulness and meditation to ease suffering of the mind and heart.



**Rhee Duthie, Sector Engagement & Development Manager, Volunteering QLD
*Post Traumatic Grief***

Rhee Duthie is of Māori and Swiss descent born in Aotearoa, NZ. While experiencing great and long loss as a young mother, she began supporting other impacted families, leading to the first community-based Trauma Support network in her region and eventually a professional led post traumatic support model especially for Schools.

A significant role as Specialist Liaison with Australian Red Cross led to her working interstate with families affected by the 2016 Dreamworld Tragedy. Culturally she is often called upon to support at end of life or in grief circles. Her way in life has involved working across the social ecologies of Health, Social Services and Sector Development. She is a Holistic art therapist, Accredited Partnership Broker, Rhee-cycling-thrifter and champions Social Connection. She now leads Sector Development for Volunteering QLD and has been an integral member of Compassionate Communities Gold Coast's development.



Merryn Gray, SPaRTa Gold Coast Grief and Bereavement Care Coordinator

Session Chair – The Interprofessional Approach to Grief & Bereavement

Merryn is a Senior Social Worker currently working as the Grief and Bereavement Coordinator for the Specialist Palliative Care Rural Telehealth Service (SPaRTa) GC Hub. Merryn has over 10 years of experience as a Social Worker for Gold Coast Health and has worked in a diverse range of health care fields including Neonatal Intensive Care, Maternity, Chronic Disease, and General Medical. In 2021, she transitioned to the Palliative Care Community Team, where she discovered a profound passion for supporting and empowering individuals and their families faced with a terminal illness. Merryn's commitment to grief and bereavement care is fueled by her dedication to improving services for rural and remote Queenslanders. She is passionate about fostering a cultural shift in how we perceive and engage with grief and loss, aiming to help foster compassionate and understanding communities.



Dr. Dean Vuksanovic, Psychologist, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Best Practical Tips in Grief & Bereavement for Clinicians

Dean is a clinical psychologist who has worked across Cancer and Palliative Care settings for the last 18 years. He specialises in Dignity Therapy and Life Review for people approaching end of life. Dean also has a research interest and publications in other psycho-oncology topics such as cancer survivorship issues and is assisting in building a research capacity at Gold Coast Health.



Lynn Berger, Clinical Lead Bereavement Service, SPaRTa

Best Practical Tips in Grief & Bereavement for Clinicians

Lynn Berger is the Statewide Grief and Bereavement Clinical Lead with SPaRTa. She is an experienced senior social worker with an extensive background across government and non-government sectors, both in Australia and internationally. Lynn's practice spans across palliative care, trauma, community development, and leadership. She brings a strong clinical, systemic, and compassionate approach to supporting individuals, families, and teams through complex grief, loss, and bereavement experiences.



Montana Zillfleisch, Senior Occupational Therapist, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health
Staff Wellbeing - Building the Best Culture of Resilience

Montana is a Senior Occupational Therapist working part time in the Specialist Palliative Care (SPC) Community Team and part time across the Geriatric Evaluation and Management in the Home (GEMITH) and Hospital in the Home (HITH) Teams. She is passionate about community-based care and specialises in supporting individuals with life-limiting conditions, as well as older adults. Her practice focuses on promoting, maintaining, and adapting independence, with the aim of reducing unnecessary hospital and residential aged care admissions where possible. Montana is committed to empowering individuals and their families to live meaningful lives at every stage, while also advocating for occupational balance to support staff wellbeing within the workplace.



Alison Harris, Senior Social Worker, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health
Staff Wellbeing – Building the Best Culture of Resilience

Alison is a Senior Social Worker with a background as a Registered Nurse. She has been with the Specialist Palliative Care Service since August 2022 primarily based with the Community Allied Health Team. Alison has over 25 years' experience in the health and community care sectors including ten years working with cancer care NGOs. In 2025, she completed a 350-hour trauma-informed yoga teacher training program and enjoys sharing mindful movement practices with others who work in healthcare. Alison is an advocate for health and care systems that foster safety, connection, inclusivity and compassion – for patients, for their loved ones, and for staff.



Katie Sully, Clinical Facilitator, Infectious Diseases/ Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health
Managing Grief After Hours in an Acute Care Setting

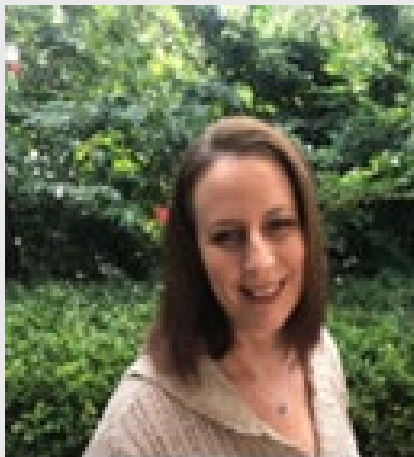
Katie Sully is an experienced nurse who has worked for over 15 years in the Infectious Diseases IPU. Her career has spanned the transition from the old hospital to the new, and she nursed through the challenges and personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across these years, Katie has cared for patients with complex and often life-limiting illness, shaping her deep respect for palliative care as an integral part of good nursing practice. Her passion for palliative care has grown through real moments at the bedside—listening to patients, navigating uncertainty, and supporting families through some of their hardest days. She believes palliative care is about presence, honesty and seeing the person beyond the diagnosis.



Anita Cox, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Session Chair – Communication

Anita has spent 30 years working in paediatric oncology, bone marrow transplant and adult oncology departments in England and Australia in tertiary hospitals, regional hospitals and in the public and private sectors. Although relatively new to specialist palliative care, Anita is passionate about listening to consumer views and improving services and care provision accordingly and encourages patients, families and peers to get comfortable with discussing advanced care planning ASAP.



Tracey Norling, Nurse Practitioner, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Mastering Tough Conversations

Tracey is a Nurse Practitioner in the Specialist Palliative Care Service. Tracey has an extensive background in oncology, haematology, and palliative care nursing. Her focus is on delivering compassionate clinical care, empowering nursing through education, and providing nursing leadership that drives system and quality improvement initiatives and change management.



Matilda Nicholson, Senior Social Worker, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Mastering Tough Conversations

Matilda is a Senior Social Worker in the Specialist Palliative Care Service at the Gold Coast Hospital. Matilda graduated with a Master of Social Work & Bachelor of Human Services through La Trobe University in 2013. Matilda spent a decade of her career working in the diverse northern metropolitan areas of Melbourne, working across community mental health, aged care, homelessness, and health sectors.

Matilda moved to the Gold Coast in 2023 and has been working with Gold Coast Health since, beginning in Oncology and is currently in Specialist Palliative Care. Matilda's current areas of focus in the palliative care space include championing increased home-based service access for under-65s, communication skills education and supporting patients experiencing existential distress. Matilda completed the Graduate Diploma of Palliative Care through Flinders University in 2025 and is a licensed VitalTalk faculty member.



Dr Shantona Bag, Staff Specialist, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Mastering Tough Conversations

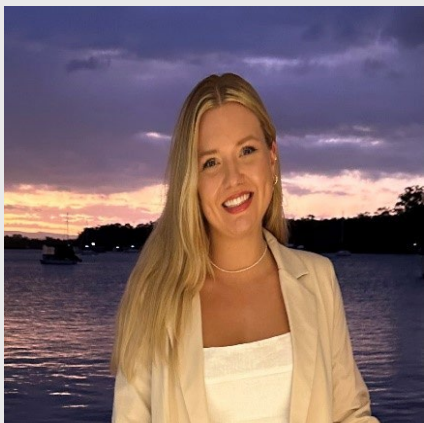
Dr Shantona Bag is a Palliative Care Consultant at the Gold Coast Specialist Palliative Care Service. Trained in Sydney, Shantona is now part of the dynamic team of consultants at the Gold Coast, as well as a Senior Lecturer with University of Queensland. Her portfolio includes advanced training education within her local HHS as well as part of the Queensland Palliative Medicine Education Committee and has interests in communication and audits within the service.



Dr Joanne Cerni, Staff Specialist, Specialist Palliative Care, Gold Coast Health

Mastering Tough Conversations

Dr Jo Cerni is a Palliative Medicine Physician working at the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service in Specialist Palliative Care and Kidney Supportive Care. Jo's special interests include non-malignant palliative care and clinical education.



Emily Mitchell, Advanced Palliative Care Occupational Therapist, Gold Coast Health

In Flow — Interprofessional Practice Remix & Conclusion

Emily Mitchell is an Advanced Occupational Therapist in the Queensland Specialist Palliative Rural Telehealth Service (SPaRTa) and the Chair of the Statewide Palliative Care Occupational Therapy Collaborative. Emily has had the opportunity to transform her experience as a rural generalist into specialist palliative care services to deliver statewide workforce capacity building strategy along the care continuum. Emily's primary focus is empowering clinicians to deliver values based, locally accessible specialist palliative care services through leading innovative service delivery change management and clinical education initiatives.

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