Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4100

Simper, Elsie

(1905 - 1999)

Born	19050101, Victoria Australia
Died	19990830, Victoria Australia
Occupation	Matron, Nurse

Summary

Sister Elsie Simper was the Matron of Warrawee Private Hospital in Broken Hill from 1933 until 1943, and was the founder of the District Nursing Service.

Details

Elsie Simper grew up at Smythesdale, Victoria, the eldest of five children of Alfred Simper, an alluvial gold miner, and his wife Elizabeth. She began her nursing career in 1925 at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital in Melbourne where, after completing two and a half years of general training, she became a senior nurse.

The prospect of gaining higher wages and of working with Dr. Kneebone, a very well respected surgeon, convinced Elsie to move to Broken Hill in 1928. There she undertook general and midwifery training at the Broken Hill and District Hospital. In 1933 and with only £15 to her name, Elsie bought the Warrawee Private Hospital on Oxide Street, which had been operating since late 1924. At first, Sister Simper was on call 24 hours a day as there was no night sister. Her tireless work paid off, as the 6-bed hospital was soon too small to house all of her patients. In 1937 Elsie bought the Cable Hotel and converted it into a new 12-bed hospital. During her ten years as Matron of Warrawee Private Hospital, Elsie delivered an average of 110 babies a year and was proud to report no maternal deaths and only five stillborn babies.

In 1942, after the opening of the new wing of the Broken Hill and District Hospital in September 1941, Warrawee closed. After taking a course in Infant Welfare at Tresillian in Sydney, Sister Simper returned to Broken Hill and in 1943 she founded the District Nursing Service. She ran the service for three years from the Broken Hill and District Hospital.

Elsie left Broken Hill in 1946 to visit her parents in Ballarat, and there she accepted a permanent position at the Maternal and Infant Welfare Service. She retired in 1971 and subsequently undertook voluntary work with several organisations including Meals on Wheels, the Day Centre for the Blind, the Walker Street Spastic centre and the Quota Club. She died in 1999 at the age of 94.

This entry was prepared and written by Georgia Moodie.

Published resources

Site Exhibition
Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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