

**A MATTER OF URGENCY! REMOTE ABORIGINAL
WOMEN'S HEALTH:**

**Examining the transfer, adaptation and implementation of an
established holistic Aboriginal Well Women's Health program
from one remote community to another with similar needs
and characteristics.**

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without any acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed *Jillian Mary Graham Mitchell*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
Candidate’s Declaration	i
Glossary of Terms	xviii
<i>Reference.</i>	xix
Abbreviations and Acronyms	xx
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xxi
PREFACE	xxii
CHAPTER 1: A MATTER OF URGENCY!.....	1
1.1 <i>Introduction</i>	1
1.2 <i>The Setting</i>	3
1.3 <i>Higher Mortality of Aboriginal people</i>	4
1.4 <i>The health crisis that provided the original catalyst for my research</i>	6
<i>Sexual assault on women and children</i>	9
<i>The health of Aboriginal women</i>	10
Figure 1: Diabetes age-specific death rates 1999-2001 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004a).....	12
1.5 <i>‘Aboriginal Women’s Business’</i>	12
<i>Incidence of cancer in Aboriginal women</i>	13
Breast cancer	15
Cervical cancer	15
<i>Cervical screening results</i>	17
1.6 <i>Maternal Health</i>	18
Figure 3 Perinatal death rates for SA, NT, WA and Queensland.....	19
1.7 <i>The research question and its genesis</i>	20
1.8 <i>Formulating the research question</i>	21
1.9 <i>Clarifying the research question</i>	21
1.10 <i>The research methodology</i>	22
1.11 <i>South of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands (AP Lands)</i>	24
<i>The recipient community</i>	25
1.12 <i>The community who chose to be the partner in the research</i>	26

<i>Being invited in</i>	26
<i>Adaptation of the program and tools</i>	27
1.13 <i>The significance of this research</i>	28
<i>Filling the gap</i>	29
1.14 <i>Well Health</i>	30
<i>Community development as a pathway to improved health outcomes</i>	33
<i>Health promotion</i>	34
1.15 <i>How this program fits the National Aboriginal Health Strategy</i>	35
<i>South Australian framework</i>	37
<i>Potential barriers to holistic approaches in remote Aboriginal women’s health</i>	38
1.16 <i>Summary</i>	38
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW - PAST TO PRESENT	41
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	41
2.2 <i>Reaffirming the research question</i>	42
2.3 <i>Empowerment</i>	43
<i>The Researcher:</i>	44
<i>External Healthcare providers:</i>	44
<i>The local health providers</i>	45
<i>The clientele</i>	45
2.4 <i>How European history has impacted on Aboriginal health</i>	47
<i>Aboriginal Culture</i>	47
<i>Traditional food sources</i>	48
<i>Tools</i>	49
<i>Families and Kinship</i>	49
2.5 <i>The Effects of Colonisation- ‘The European Invasion’</i>	50
<i>The Impact of Dispossession</i>	50
<i>Loss of Lands and Cultural Life</i>	51
<i>Mission stations</i>	52
<i>The Devastation of Disease and Depravation</i>	53
2.6 <i>Aboriginal Women</i>	54

2.7 Slavery and kidnapping of Aboriginal children	54
2.8 Stolen Generations	55
2.9 Discrimination and no recognition of Human Rights	57
2.10 Incarceration of Aboriginal people and deaths in custody	58
2.11 Advocacy	60
<i>From Anthropologist to Activist</i>	60
2.12 Advocating for the Rights of Aboriginal Women.....	61
2.13 The Impact of the Assimilation policy	62
<i>Assimilation to Integration</i>	63
<i>The right to vote</i>	63
2.14 The Continuing Inequality of Health.....	64
<i>The Great Australian Silence</i>	64
2.15 Control and Disempowerment.....	66
<i>Discrimination and Inequity of Resources</i>	67
2.16 Remoteness and its impact on the determinants of Aboriginal health	68
<i>Geographical classification of areas</i>	68
Figure 2 Areas of remoteness showing discrete Aboriginal communities.	69
<i>The issues of distance</i>	69
2.17 Nursing History Snapshot:-the establishment of remote healthcare.....	70
<i>White nurses for white settlers in the bush</i>	70
<i>The Nightingale influence</i>	70
<i>The rural/remote communities' nursing needs</i>	71
<i>The Bush Nurses' role</i>	72
<i>Isolation</i>	72
<i>The Border Nurse</i>	73
<i>Duties of a Border Nurse 1924</i>	74
<i>Transition to nursing home clinic services</i>	74
<i>Aboriginal healthcare</i>	75
<i>John Flynn's vision and transformation of bush health services</i>	75
<i>The Royal Flying Doctor Service</i>	75
<i>Remote area nurses</i>	76

2.18 Current context of Aboriginal women's health in remote communities.....	77
<i>Inability of RAN workforce and resources to meet needs</i>	78
<i>Control and dominance of non-Aboriginal nurses</i>	79
<i>Limited opportunities for Aboriginal Registered Nurses</i>	79
2.19 Context for Remote Health Services in Far North West of SA.....	82
2.20 Women's Health.....	82
<i>Women's Health Reform</i>	83
<i>Planning healthcare to benefit Aboriginal women and their families</i>	84
<i>Attention to the remote environment of Aboriginal women</i>	85
<i>Summary</i>	87
CHAPTER 3: SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH AND	
RESEARCH TRANSFER.....	
3.1 A Feminist approach	88
3.2 A holistic approach to women's health	90
3.3 Primary Health Care (PHC)	91
3.4 Determined Principles of Success	91
<i>Key elements of an effective and sustainable program</i>	92
3.5 Exemplars of Successful Aboriginal Women's Health Strategies	93
<i>Poor Nutrition and Low Birth weight</i>	94
<i>Improved Nutrition</i>	95
<i>Program strategies</i>	96
<i>Program strengths</i>	96
3.6 Maternal and Infant Health.....	97
<i>Program strategies</i>	97
<i>Program strengths</i>	98
3.7 Aboriginal women's screening programs	99
<i>Cancer</i>	99
<i>Cervical cancer</i>	100
<i>Breast Cancer</i>	101
<i>Program strengths</i>	101
3.8 Sexual Health	102

<i>Program strategies</i>	103
<i>Program strengths</i>	105
3.9 <i>Young teenage women</i>	107
<i>A holistic approach to meet the needs of Aboriginal women</i>	108
3.10 <i>Aboriginal Well Women's Holistic Health Care in Central Australian Remote Communities</i>	109
<i>Program strategies and strengths</i>	109
3.11 <i>Mental Health</i>	110
<i>Program strategies</i>	113
<i>Program strengths</i>	113
<i>Comorbidities</i>	114
3.12 <i>Family Violence and Sexual Assault</i>	115
3.13 <i>Trauma from sexual assault</i>	116
<i>Program strategies</i>	117
<i>Program strengths</i>	117
SUMMARY	118
3.14 <i>Research Transfer</i>	118
<i>Dissemination and effective implementation of research transfer</i>	118
<i>Implementation principles</i>	120
<i>Key Elements of program success</i>	122
3.15 <i>Concepts of transferability</i>	123
3.16 <i>Summary</i>	125
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	126
4.1 <i>Introduction</i>	126
4.2 <i>Overview of the study design</i>	128
4.3 <i>Ethical considerations</i>	132
<i>Researcher accountability</i>	132
<i>The community expectations</i>	132
<i>Cultural considerations</i>	133
4.4 <i>A Partnership Model for Ethical Indigenous Research</i>	135
<i>Ethics applications</i>	136

4.5 Participation.....	136
<i>Informed consent</i>	136
4.6 <i>Benefits to the community</i>	137
4.7 <i>Theoretical Framework</i>	139
<i>Using Theory to Develop a Useful Model</i>	139
<i>A synthesis of Naturalistic Inquiry and Critical Social Theory and the use of multiple methods</i>	141
4.8 <i>Naturalistic Inquiry</i>	143
4.9 <i>The Rationale for Naturalistic Inquiry</i>	144
4.10 <i>The context using Naturalistic Inquiry</i>	145
4.11 <i>Critical Theory applied to Aboriginal Women’s Health</i>	146
<i>Powerlessness to empowerment</i>	149
4.12 <i>The Rationale for Critical Social Science</i>	151
<i>Human consciousness</i>	154
<i>Oppression</i>	154
4.13 <i>Other philosophers of Critical Social Theory</i>	157
<i>The Historical Passage of Critical Theory from the 1920s</i>	158
<i>War, oppression and human atrocity</i>	158
<i>Freedom and expression</i>	160
4.14 <i>Revival through Habermas</i>	161
<i>Linking Critical theory with this Aboriginal Well Women’s Health Research</i>	163
4.15 <i>The Rationale for (Triangulation) mixed methods</i>	163
4.16 <i>Bringing Naturalistic Inquiry, Critical Social Theory, PAR and Community Development together: application to practice</i>	166
<i>Exploring the context</i>	168
4.17 <i>The background to community empowerment models in Aboriginal research</i>	170
<i>Anthropology</i>	170
<i>Applied Anthropology</i>	172
4.18 <i>Participatory Action Research (PAR)</i>	173
4.19 <i>Participatory Action Research and Community Development</i>	174

<i>Community Empowerment and Development</i>	177
4.20 <i>The Emergent AWWH Model</i>	179
<i>Building on Policy and Research Findings</i>	179
4.21 <i>Evaluation using Critical Social Science</i>	182
4.22 <i>Process evaluation</i>	184
<i>Impact Evaluation</i>	184
4.23 <i>Summary</i>	185
CHAPTER 5: METHODS	186
5.1 <i>Introduction</i>	186
<i>My Role as the Researcher</i>	186
5.2 <i>Researcher access to the field</i>	187
<i>Community approval</i>	187
<i>Access to the Pitjantjatjara Lands</i>	188
<i>Access to effective health programs for Aboriginal women's health</i>	189
<i>Invitations into the community</i>	190
<i>Access into a South Australian remote community</i>	191
5.3 <i>Research integrity</i>	193
<i>Responsiveness</i>	194
<i>Leadership</i>	195
<i>Reciprocity</i>	196
5.4 <i>Validity (Trustworthiness)</i>	198
<i>Credibility</i>	199
<i>Transferability</i>	200
<i>Dependability</i>	201
<i>Confirmability</i>	201
<i>Reliability</i>	202
<i>Interrelater reliability</i>	203
5.5 <i>Research Design</i>	204
5.6 <i>Adaptation of Wolcott's Model to this research</i>	204
5.7 <i>Sampling</i>	207
<i>The samples</i>	207

<i>Participants experiencing the program</i>	208
<i>Healthcare providers implementing and adapting the program</i>	209
<i>SUMMARY</i>	209
<i>5.8 Data collection tools</i>	209
<i> AWWH checklist</i>	210
<i> Semi-structured interviews and questionnaire</i>	210
<i> The participating Aboriginal women’s semi-structured interview questionnaire</i>	210
<i> Healthcare provider’s semi-structured questionnaire</i>	211
<i>5.9 Data Collection</i>	212
<i>5.10 Examining (Archival research)</i>	215
<i> Non-participant strategies</i>	215
<i>5.11 Experiencing (Participant observation)</i>	216
<i>5.12 Enquiring (Interviewing)</i>	218
<i> Key Informants</i>	218
<i> Healthcare providers in Central Australia and participating women</i>	218
<i> Healthcare providers working in the AWWH team in SA</i>	219
<i> The Community Women participating in the SA AWWH program</i>	220
<i> Ethics in Action</i>	221
<i> Informed consent</i>	221
<i> Data Ownership and Management</i>	222
<i>5.13 Qualitative data analysis</i>	222
<i> Thematic Analysis</i>	222
<i>5.14 The data analysis process</i>	223
<i>5.15 Quantitative data analysis</i>	226
<i>5.16 Evaluation of the AWWH program</i>	227
<i>5.17 Aylward’s Evaluation Model</i>	228
<i>5.18 The Program Evaluation Objectives</i>	230
<i>5.19 The Evaluation Strategies</i>	230
<i> Process evaluation</i>	231
<i> Impact Evaluation</i>	232

5.20 Links with others	232
5.21 Program Management.....	233
5.22 Resource mobilisation	233
5.23 Organisational structures.....	234
5.24 Participation.....	236
<i>Individual women</i>	236
<i>Healthcare providers</i>	236
<i>The community</i>	237
5.25 Leadership	237
5.26 Problem assessment	238
5.27 The role of outside agents	239
5.28 Asking why.....	240
5.29 Summary.....	241
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS	242
6.1 Introduction	242
<i>Phase 1</i>	242
<i>The progress of consultation</i>	242
<i>The Sample</i>	243
6.2 Major Themes from Key Informant data.....	243
<i>Drug and Alcohol and Inhalant substance use</i>	243
<i>Interfamily violence</i>	243
<i>Sexual health Screening</i>	244
<i>Well health screening strategies</i>	244
<i>Practical management and research implementation concerns</i>	244
6.3 Document review	245
6.4 Field notes	245
<i>Summary of findings in Phase 1</i>	246
<i>Phase 2 - The consultation process and interaction</i>	246
<i>The Sample</i>	247
<i>Aboriginal Women Community Leaders</i>	248
6.5 Major themes	249

<i>Core elements of successful programs</i>	250
<i>Difficulties encountered with health programs</i>	251
<i>Women’s Sexual Health</i>	252
<i>Teenage Girls</i>	253
<i>Breast Screening</i>	254
<i>A holistic approach to women’s health</i>	254
<i>Disability programs and rehabilitation</i>	255
<i>Nurse Practitioners</i>	255
<i>CA Well Women’s health program (described in Chapter 2)</i>	256
<i>Central Australian Aboriginal women’s views</i>	256
<i>The needs of Aboriginal women in the recipient SA remote community</i>	258
6.6 <i>Document review</i>	259
6.7 <i>Field Notes</i>	259
<i>SA Recipient community</i>	262
<i>Summary of findings</i>	262
<i>Phase 3 The continuing consultation process, implementation and evaluation of the program</i>	263
6.7 <i>The Transferred Program Evaluation</i>	265
6.8 <i>Establishing the Program</i>	265
6.9 <i>Results</i>	266
<i>Process Evaluation</i>	266
<i>The original CA program checklist components</i>	267
<i>The Requirements of the reciprocal community</i>	268
6.10 <i>Evaluating the AWWH Checklist as a useful screening tool</i>	271
<i>Health information</i>	271
<i>The Project Advisory Group</i>	276
<i>PAG meetings</i>	277
<i>PAG minutes</i>	277
<i>The organisation of the first intensive screening program</i>	278
6.11 <i>Evaluation of the PAG</i>	278
<i>The role of the GP in the PAG</i>	279

<i>The role of the Social Health and Well Being Coordinator in the PAG</i>	279
<i>Combining skills and expertise with the government employed Women’s Health Nurse</i>	280
<i>The role of the CEO of the Aboriginal health service in the PAG</i>	281
<i>The role of the clinic team in the program and the PAG</i>	282
<i>Visiting team members</i>	282
<i>The researcher.....</i>	283
<i>Participatory role of critique and continual improvement of the program</i>	283
<i>6.12 The Delivery of the Program.....</i>	284
<i> Program 1 November 2004</i>	284
<i>6.13 Reporting the AWWH screening results.....</i>	287
<i> Screening Results Program 1 Nov 30 -Dec 3 2004.....</i>	288
<i>Table 1 Screening results program 1</i>	289
<i> Health Education sessions.....</i>	290
<i>6.14 Summary.....</i>	292
<i>Table 2 Screening results program 2.....</i>	293
<i>6.15 Health information sessions</i>	294
<i> Lifestyle sessions</i>	295
<i> SUMMARY</i>	295
<i> Screening results Program 3 June 13-16 2005</i>	296
<i>Table 3 Screening results program 3.....</i>	296
<i> Health Information</i>	297
<i> Lifestyle sessions</i>	297
<i> Screening results Program 4 September 5-9 2005.....</i>	297
<i>Table 4 Screening results program 4.....</i>	298
<i> SUMMARY</i>	299
<i> Screening Results Program 5 27-31 March 2006</i>	300
<i>Table 5 Screening results program 5.....</i>	300
<i> Health information</i>	301
<i> Lifestyle sessions</i>	301
<i>Table 6 Screening results program 6.....</i>	301

<i>Cervical screening</i>	301
Table 7 Age groups of women attending the sixth AWWH program.....	302
<i>Health Education sessions</i>	302
<i>Lifestyle sessions</i>	302
SUMMARY	303
6.16 <i>The Impact of the AWWH Program</i>	304
<i>Culturally acceptability</i>	304
<i>Reaching the target group of Aboriginal women not accessing mainstream services for well health screening.</i>	304
<i>Sexual Health Screening Results</i>	305
Table 8 Pap smears for AWWH program Nov 2004 –July 2006.....	305
<i>Figure 3 Comparison by graph of the cervical screening data across programs</i> ..	306
<i>Breast screening</i>	307
<i>Statistical evidence</i>	308
<i>Comparison of sexually transmitted diseases across programs</i>	308
Table 9 Sexually transmitted infections	309
<i>Comparison of renal screens across programs</i>	309
<i>Dental disease in the women in this community</i>	311
Table 11 Dental disease.....	312
<i>Figure 4 Reported dental disease</i>	312
<i>Access to dental services</i>	313
<i>Family violence and drug and alcohol issues</i>	313
SUMMARY	314
6.17 <i>Evaluation of Community empowerment</i>	314
Table 12 Health Principles Domains Evaluation	315
6.18 <i>Program management (domain)</i>	316
<i>PAR critique Program 1</i>	316
<i>PAG Critique Program 2</i>	318
<i>PAG Critique Program 3</i>	319
6.19 <i>Leadership (domain)</i>	321
<i>PAG Critique Program 4</i>	322

6.20 Resource mobilisation (domain)	325
<i>The need for Child Care throughout the program</i>	327
6.21 Recommendations from the PAG	327
A Coordinator.....	327
Health Education.....	328
Encouraging women’s participation in activities	328
Designated times for the younger women to attend	328
School Students.....	329
Sustainability and Effectiveness	329
6.22 Participation (domain).....	329
Integrated Services and collaboration	330
6.23 Healthcare providers.....	331
6.24 Problem Assessment and Resolution (domain)	331
6.25 Resource Mobilisation (domain).....	333
6.26 The Roles of Outside Agents (domain).....	335
6.27 Organisational structures (domain).....	335
Table 13 Healthcare providers suggestions for lifestyle and information sessions	339
6.28 Participation (domain).....	339
<i>The views of participating community women</i>	339
Program attendance	339
Table 14 Age groups of women responding to the best time to attend AWWH program	340
Program content.....	340
Table 15 Women’s responses in age groups to if the AWWH program met their needs	341
<i>Helping to improve Aboriginal women’s health</i>	342
Table 16 How the AWWH program had helped the women who responded.....	342
Table 17 Aboriginal Women’s comments on sessions and improvements they would like included in the AWWH program	343
Health sessions	343
Activities.....	343

Health sessions	343
Activities.....	343
Health sessions	343
Activities.....	343
6.29 <i>Strengths of the Program</i>	345
<i>Interest and support of community women</i>	345
6.30 <i>Limitations</i>	346
<i>Problem assessment (domain)</i>	346
<i>Links with others (domain)</i>	348
<i>Lack of structured health information sessions</i>	348
<i>Lack of a Coordinator</i>	348
<i>Lack of community programs in chronic disease management and mental health</i>	349
6.31 <i>Concluding Remarks of Results</i>	349
6.32 <i>Key findings</i>	351
<i>For the Aboriginal community women</i>	351
6.33 <i>Transfer and potential for sustainability</i>	352
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION	353
7.1 <i>Introduction</i>	353
<i>Primary Health Care</i>	355
7.2 <i>The Need for Comprehensive Primary Health Care to Address Aboriginal Health</i>	357
<i>Compounding issues that have delayed an effective comprehensive approach to Primary Health</i>	358
7.3 <i>The Strengths and Limitations of the Transfer of an effective AWWH program</i>	359
<i>Strengths</i>	359
<i>Limitations</i>	361
7.4 <i>Dental Health</i>	362
7.5 <i>Renal disease</i>	363
7.6 <i>Identifying deficits in health</i>	364

<i>Comorbidity of disease</i>	365
<i>Governance</i>	365
<i>Leadership</i>	366
<i>The demise of communication and individual contribution and voices through the PAG</i>	367
7.7 <i>Moving Aboriginal Women’s Health Forward</i>	368
7.8 <i>Conclusion</i>	371
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....	373
8.1. <i>Introduction</i>	373
8.2. <i>The contribution of this research</i>	373
<i>A transfer model</i>	373
<i>Evaluating empowerment</i>	373
<i>Evaluating the program</i>	374
<i>Change of practice to Primary Health Care</i>	374
8.3 <i>How this research has filled a gap in the knowledge</i>	375
8.4 <i>Implications</i>	376
8.5 <i>The transferable model of an effective health program</i>	377
8.6 <i>Strengths of the study</i>	378
<i>Mixed Methods</i>	378
8.7 <i>Limitations of the Research</i>	380
<i>Generalisations</i>	380
<i>Community women’s views</i>	380
<i>Quantitative data</i>	381
<i>The attendance of the researcher at all AWWH programs</i>	381
8.8 <i>Recommendations</i>	382
8.9 <i>Concluding statements</i>	384
<i>REFERENCES</i>	385
DATA TOOLS.....	406
APPENDIX 1	406
<i>Well Women’s Health Checklist</i>	406
<i>Physical and Mental health and Social Wellbeing Assessment</i>	406

Mental Health continued, family history, doctors comments and referrals	406
Sexual Health “Special Women’s Business”	406
APPENDIX 2	410
First Semi Structured Questionnaire for Staff (2004-2005).....	410
First Semi Structured Questionnaire for Staff (2004-2005).....	411
APPENDIX 3	412
Evaluation of the Aboriginal Well Women’s Health Program 2006.	412

Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal - A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent:- this is often the preferred title by Aboriginal people for themselves.

Capacity building - 'an approach to the development of sustainable skills, organisable structures, resources and commitment to health improvement in health and other sectors'. *Better Choices Better Health p 199*

Cross Cultural - A term used to express an awareness of more than one culture also used as awareness that people of other cultures have different needs, values and experiences and lifestyles (Shine SA Cultural Training Package, 2000).

Community. is seen as a geographical concept a group of people living in a particular local area, or it can be known as having a psychological sense of membership, as aligned with social networks or associations.

Cultural respect - Refers to the recognition, protection and continued advancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is achieved when cultural differences are respected. (AHMAC 2003)

Equity - 'Fairness, people's needs meet the distribution of opportunities for well being' (*Better Choices Better Health p 199*)

General Practitioner - ' a medical practitioner who provides primary comprehensive and continuing care (where possible) to patients and their families within the community'. (*Royal Australian College of General Practitioners cited in Better Choices Better Health p199*)

Health Promotion - '...A process of enabling people to increase control of the determinants of health and thereby improve their health ' (*Better Choices Better Health p 199*).

Health Status - 'a description and/or measurement of the health of an individual or population at a particular point in time against identifiable standards ' *Better Choices Better Health p200*

Indicator - ' A specific measure for assessing progress against goals,...that reflects, directly or indirectly, the performance of an intervention ... in maintaining or increasing the wellbeing of its target population ' (*Better Choices Better Health p 200*)

Indigenous - A popular term used in Australia to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people actually translated it means 'born to the land'. This could also

be applied to other non- Indigenous people and therefore many Aboriginal people are concerned about the correctness of this term.

Medicare - 'Australia's universal health insurance scheme introduced in 1984. Australia's public hospital system is funded jointly by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and is administered by state or territory health departments. The Health Insurance Commission administers the Medicare program which includes enrolments and benefits' (*Better Choices Better Health p 200*).

Outcome - 'A measurable change in the health of an individual, a group of people or a population, which is attributable to an intervention or a series of interventions.' *Better Choices Better Health p 200*

Oppression - The systemic use of power or authority to treat others unjustly.

Quality of life - 'An individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value system where they live and in relation to their goals and expectations, standards and concerns.' *Better Choices Better Health p 201*

Social determinants of health - specific features of and pathways by which societal conditions affect health and that potentially can be altered by informed action. *Better Choices Better Health p 201*

Standardised mortality rate - 'the number of deaths in the population within a year expressed as a percentage of deaths that would be expected if the population concerned had experienced the same sex and age related specific mortality rates as those recorded for a population as a whole'. *Better Choices Better Health p 201*

Whitefellas - A term used by some Aboriginal people to describe non Aboriginal people

Reference.

Better Choices Better Health. Final Report of the South Australian Generational Health Review (Department of Human Services Generational Health Review Committee 2003, p274).

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCHS – Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service
AHAC - Aboriginal Health Advisory Committee
AHCSA - Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia
AHS – Aboriginal Health Strategy
AHW - Aboriginal Health worker
AMA - Australian Medical Association
AHMAC - Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council
ATSIC - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWWH Aboriginal Well Women’s Health
CRCATH – Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health
DHS - Department of Human Services
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MBS - Medicare Benefits Scheme
MSHR – Menzies School of Health Research
NAHS - National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NATSIHC – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council
NHMRC – National Health and Medical Research Council
NPHP – National Public Health Partnership
NPY WC - Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council
SHINE SA - Sexual Health Information Networking and Education South Australia
SMR - Standardised Mortality Ratio
STIs – Sexually transmitted Infections
WHO - World Health Organisation

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PREFACE

Introducing my interest in remote Aboriginal health

My allure to Indigenous health began many years ago when I first completed my nursing registration and moved to Darwin for my husband's work commitments. The Northern Territory provided me with an opportunity to work with the Commonwealth Home Nursing Service. This community-established health service included school children, Fanny Bay gaol prisoners, people requiring home visits in Darwin as well as those further 'down the track'. There were a high proportion of Aboriginal clients and some of these lived 'out bush' at least 18 km from any amenity. It was often difficult to locate these clients as they moved to where food and water were available. During my stay I learnt much about the multiple health problems of this community. When I returned to Adelaide to undertake midwifery training, an essential requirement to complement my general nursing skills, my goal was to return to the Northern Territory as soon as possible. However, I was unable to return as intended.

Some years later, I filled a temporary remote nursing role, relieving the solitary Registered Nurse in Fregon, a remote community in the Pitjantjatjara Lands of Far North West South Australia (SA). This Aboriginal community had a population that varied from 180 to 400 people, depending on the time of year and ceremonies taking place. Over the Christmas period, my family, together with two office workers and two mechanics, were the only non-Aboriginal persons ("whitefellas") in the community, as all teaching and administration staff had headed south for holidays and family reunions. It was a welcoming community and my work involved a daily

routine of providing clinics, occasional midwifery services and using my trauma and suturing skills. I remember one man who sat patiently through the seventeen sutures I applied to his wound, which had occurred when his tomahawk tool used for carving wood, held by his feet, missed its target and sliced cleanly through his calf.

My worst experience was trying to suture my own son's arm in a stifling hot clinic, with what appeared to be dozens of large dark eyes peering through the window. All were interested in the noise forthcoming from my seven-year-old who had slipped climbing the iron fence surrounding the house. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the work and living in the community, but all too soon it was time to leave.

Idealistically, I made myself a promise that at some time in the future, I would again use my nursing skills to assist Aboriginal health and although it is now many years later, I believe this study has offered this opportunity.

To convey and clarify to the reader about my role in this research and its findings, I will use the first person from time to time. To maintain confidentiality, the name of the recipient remote community in South Australia has not been identified and it has been referred to as 'the recipient remote community'.