

Sleep Apnea Awareness Day – My Story
by Diana Lagrange

As a highly qualified and extensively experienced Registered Nurse of four decades and still working, I was aware of sleep apnea but only in a somewhat peripheral way. Working as a Critical Care and Emergency Nurse in both metropolitan hospitals and remote work sites, there were always more urgent issues requiring my attention in my workplace.

As a divorced single Mum, shift worker and compulsive volunteer, I have always been extremely busy, cramming everything possible into my days and life. I relocated to Australia from South Africa as a solo Mum when the children were 8 and 12 years old, and we started our new lives from scratch. I had slept badly for as long as I could remember, putting this down to (then) young children – now grown up and left home, physical fatigue of three jobs to feed my family, swinging from night-to-day-to-night shifts, etc. Waking up exhausted was considered to be normal.

A year ago my Cardiologist did a holter monitor screen to check my heart – I have a non-life threatening atrial arrhythmia. The results showed “something was going on” during my sleep, so he referred me for a sleep study. This was done at the amazing Sleep Clinic at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth.

To my surprise I was diagnosed with moderate obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)!! I had no idea

I now have a gorgeous little CPAP machine and also a mandibular advancement splint (MAS). The reason for both these interventions was because I love going remote places for both work and pleasure – often off-grid, so this offers great flexibility. I also have a battery for my CPAP as a third option, so can go anywhere and do anything while still getting good sleep. OSA is not stopping me!!

A factor that really galvanized me into action was the increasingly studied link between sleep apnea and dementia/Alzheimer's. As a health professional, I have seen the effects of these diseases on both patients and families alike, and was keen to do all possible to stave this off.

A new era of my life has commenced – great sleep, and I've recently married the love of my life. George had not been worried by my snoring as he sleeps very soundly – lucky man! Importantly, though, he has been a wonderful support through the apnea diagnosis process and purchase of the devices. It is really important to have had someone “on my side” as it can be rather a grueling and confronting experience.

