**The Skeleton Project – Northern Health**

**Greg Pullen, CEO, Northern Health**

**Greg Pullen:** I'm Greg Pullen, CEO of Northern Health. The largest health service provider in northern Melbourne.

[Music playing]

**Photographer:** Here we go.

**Greg Pullen:** I'm quite passionate about workplace safety. So Northern has a very interactive way of dealing with the workplace safety. We like to teach. We like to learn from people as well.

I think I'll learn things as a researcher that I would never learn as a CEO. Well it's a bit daunting to me I must admit, but sometimes I feel as though - stuck in the corporate office, I'm a bit isolated in an ivory tower.

So, what I hope to do is to get down on the work - work floor and find out what actually goes on and what can be improved. I'm sure there are practices and processes in place at the moment that can be tweaked to make it safer for staff.

[Music playing]

**Male:** I'd just like to introduce you to Graham Hart. He's the research team leader.

**Michael Bowen:** Hi. Nice to meet you.

**Graham:** Nice to meet you.

**Male:** Just show basically Graham how you go about doing all your day-to-day activities mate.

**Michael Bowen:** We usually just mop the floors. We just make sure there's a sign -

**Graham:** Yes.

**Michael Bowen:** - so people can't slip, slip over.

**Graham:** Yes, and is it normally a problem with the wet floors. Are they slippery?

**Michael Bowen:** It does get slippery. That's why we put the signs up.

**Graham:** Yep.

**Michael Bowen:** We usually bring it out as much as we can, the mop, but the nurses usually know that we do it this time of the morning. There's signs up -

**Graham:** Yes.

**Michael Bowen:** - so they know.

**Kate Watson:** So you can see how many nurses are flying through and this is till actually – this is an hour after we're normally finished with this room by now. But yeah, normally this is wet in the morning, so - because they've mopped it. It only lasts like five or so minutes, but generally that's the – the busiest part of the day for that room. But, I don't know what the VSO's schedule is, so maybe there's a reason why they have to do it at that time.

**Graham:** And there mightn't be a reason. It might be just -

**Kate Watson:** It might just be -

**Graham:** - tradition.

**Kate Watson:** Yeah, that's it. That's how we start our day. I don't know, but – yeah, I don't see why we can't do it or while the room's a little bit quieter and then there's less risk.

**Graham:** How long have you been here Michael, at Northern?

**Michael Bowen:** I would have been here 15 years.

**Graham:** Is that right?

**Michael Bowen:** Yeah.

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah. And do you enjoy working here?

**Michael Bowen:** I do enjoy working here.

**Graham:** Yeah. So if we were going to – you know – go to management and say, "Listen, we've been working with staff and seeing what they're doing and we think this should happen to make their life easier," can you think of any one thing we could tell them, or?

**Michael Bowen:** Probably just maintaining the equipment.

**Graham:** Maintaining the equipment. Yeah.

**Michael Bowen:** Like the hoists. Sometimes we get a lot of remote controls. We'll grab them, try to use the hoist in the roof. It doesn't work.

**Graham:** And what happens when it breaks down? What do you do? Do you -

**Kate Watson:** Well there's an emergency thing that you can try and fiddle with and try and click it on, but if that's not working and it's really, really unhappy, then you have to go and get the manual one. We've had some issues with our remotes. Our remotes have stopped working …

**Graham:** Have they? Right.

**Kate Watson:** and that took a while to replace.

**Michael Bowen:** Knock, knock?

**Kate Watson:** You're always a bit further away from everything when you're down the back, so …

**Graham:** How much walking do you think you'd do over – have you ever used a pedometer and measured how much you do?

**Kate Watson:** I did. In my grad year - my first 10 weeks as a grad, I lost seven kilos because all I was doing was walking.

**Graham:** Perhaps I should do it.

**Kate Watson:** Yeah, you should just come. You should just be a nurse.

**Graham:** Yes.

**Kate Watson:** And I walked 22 kilometres in a shift.

**Graham:** Twenty-two kilometres. That's further than someone runs in a day in playing football.

**Kate Watson:** It hurt a lot.

**Graham:** And if you're walking 22k's a day, what footwear do you wear? Is there a more appropriate footwear to wear? Can you wear runners or do you …?

**Kate Watson:** They don't really like you wearing runners.

**Graham:** Right.

**Kate Watson:** But you're supposed to wear hard-top shoes. When I try to buy the right ones with the nice arches and all that sort of stuff, half the time they're so uncomfortable they give you blisters and you can't afford to have blisters in the shop. You have to have comfy shoes at all times.

“*I just need to go up a little bit higher just for you to take your tablets*.”

**Graham:** Now, you're a shift worker?

**Kate Watson:** Mmm.

**Graham:** It's a bit like coming back from overseas. You know, you're sort of in a different time zone aren't you, when you shift between shifts?

**Kate Watson:** Yeah, pretty much, yeah.

**Graham:** So how do you cope with that?

**Kate Watson:** There was once where I fell asleep when I was walking to my patient's room, as I was walking

**Graham:** Goodness me.

**Kate Watson: …** because I was so tired and that was during my 10 in a row. But yeah, I had to work 10 shifts in a row and it just kills you and you just – you're doing late-early so you're getting – ‘cause I live about an hour away, I wouldn't get home 'til about midnight.

**Graham:** Goodness me.

**Kate Watson:** And then you get up at 4:00 to go again. And you'll sit down when you can and you'll just – whatever's easiest just to get the patient where you need them and how you need to do it, so you just shortcut, shortcut, shortcut just to survive.

So we just grab the Kylie.

**Graham:** The Kylie sheet. You don't have to do anything special with your knees or anything like that?

**Kate Watson:** No. Well, bending's always good and try and take the pressure off your back …

**Graham:** Okay, all right.

**Kate Watson:** but you're just going to pull him up.

**Graham:** All right.

**Kate Watson:** Okay.

**Graham:** Okay.

**Kate Watson:** One, two, three. Good.

**Graham:** Have you had any injuries in your work life so far that's required you taking time off?

**Kate Watson:** Touch wood, no.

**Graham:** No, right.

**Kate Watson:** No, not me, but I think if you ask every other nurse here - yes, they have.

**Graham:** They're all lifting type injuries, are they?

**Kate Watson:** Yep, all back injuries pretty much, yes.

**Graham:** And do you think your good luck may be something to do with the overhead lifting and the mechanical devices?

**Kate Watson:** I think I've just been lucky and I'm probably going on borrowed time at the moment, I would imagine.

**Graham:** Goodness.

**Kate Watson:** Thank you very much. Ta.

**Graham:** So what's the most rewarding thing about your job, Kate?

**Kate Watson:** Probably patient satisfaction, I'd say. You tend to think that you've done a bit of a difference to someone's life.

**Graham:** Yes.

**Kate Watson:** That's always probably the best bit. I think that's why you get out bed.

**Graham:** Can you see yourself being a nurse when you're say, 60?

**Kate Watson:** Yeah.

**Graham:** You can?

**Kate Watson:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah. I just wanted to be a nurse since I was three, so, this is the only job for me, unless I get injured. But yeah, no this is -

**Graham:** Well hopefully you won't.

**Kate Watson:** Yeah, no I love it. So yeah. No other job in the world for me.

**Graham:** Well you're obviously a very caring person and you're in the right job, really. I mean it is known as the caring profession and you've shown today how – how much you care about the work you do and how you care about your patients. So that's a – that's a real credit to you.

**Greg Pullen:** I was impressed, genuinely impressed by – by Kate and Michael and their dedication to their profession and also to this organisation. I think they're great attributes and great examples of what – you know – professional staff in a public health service can actually represent.

Hospitals are very busy places. Some things are done for historical reasons rather than because that's the best way of doing things. I learnt as a CEO that I can learn a lot about the organisation from working on the shop floor, going out and visiting rather than just sitting at my desk and going to meetings and answering the telephone.

I've picked up on a few things that I'm sure will help the organisation and I think will help staff morale.

[Music playing]

**Greg Pullen:** I thought the wig might have given it away. Did you think it was the worst wig you ever saw in your life?

**Kate Watson:** No, I just tried not to look at it …

[Laughing]

**Greg Pullen:** From my perspective, getting out there and listening to you telling quite truthfully, what happens has been a revelation.

**Michael Bowen:** It's good to see that you've come down from the office. A lot of people sit up there and don’t see what really happens.

**Greg Pullen:** Well, yeah. I feel a bit embarrassed about not getting down more often.

[Music playing]

[End of Transcript]