



LCM Answers the call

Following the end of WWI the influenza pandemic ravaged the world, claiming an estimated 50 million lives.

In 1919, Lewisham Hospital in Sydney found itself inundated with hundreds of patients afflicted by the Spanish Flu. Among them, 52 sisters contracted the flu, resulting in six deaths. In response to the crisis, the Apostolic Delegate sought permission for white novices to assist in nursing influenza patients.



Lewisham Hospital,
Christchurch,
Aotearoa New Zealand

The epidemic reached New Zealand in 1918, prompting the conversion of Lewisham Hospital, Christchurch into an infectious disease institution. Over a six week period, nine of the 14 sisters working at the hospital caught the infection, with one dying. Faced with a diminished nursing staff, assistance was offered from other religious orders and the Marist Brothers. Sister Bernard Martin LCM recounted the overwhelming demand for beds, leading to the erection of tents and makeshift rooms to accommodate the growing number of patients. Throughout Christchurch sandwich men with placards on their back and front, recruited volunteers to help at Lewisham Hospital,

Despite the challenges, the epidemic marked a pivotal moment for Lewisham Hospital, Christchurch, fostering greater appreciation for the sisters' dedication and skill, resulting in increased use of the Hospital's services by patients and doctors. (*Trotter, Ann - Mary Potter's Little Company of Mary : The New Zealand Experience, 1914-2002 p.29-31*)

The demanding nature of nursing during wartime took its toll, with many nurses experiencing psychological distress, commonly referred to as shell shock, now recognised as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

One member of a group of nurses called the "Bluebirds" (a group of volunteer nurses who served in France during WWI), was treated and died at Mount St Margaret hospital at Ryde, Sydney.

During World War II, nurses returning from Benghazi, Libya, sought refuge at Mount St Margaret Hospital, drawn by the care and support offered by the LCM sisters. Additionally, American nurses sought assistance at Ryde, returning after their discharge, underscoring the ongoing need for care and rehabilitation.

Mount St Margaret also provided care to civilian victims of war including wives of plantation owners from Bougainville and North and South Soloman Islands. These women endured the trauma of Japanese occupation and the captivity of their husbands as prisoners of war. (*A century of care - Mount St Margaret hospital Ryde, 1891-1991 p.31*)



Mount St Margaret
Hospital, Ryde,
Sydney, Australia

In 1942 three Imperial Japanese Navy submarines launched attacks on Sydney and Newcastle. In response, Lewisham Hospital reinforced its wards to safeguard patients in the event of bombing raids, while staff underwent training in the use of gas masks. Although Lewisham emerged from the war unscathed, tragedy struck in 1946 when a Royal Air Force plane crashed on its grounds, claiming three lives and injuring four others.