

Plenty more: digging into the back story of Lyndoch's CEO



Lyndoch CEO Doreen Power in her former role as CEO of Plenty Valley Community Health, a position she held for just 18 months before leaving. Image: PVCH.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Tonight I am digging into the second chapter of where Lyndoch Living CEO Doreen Power worked before being chosen in late 2014 to lead our much-loved aged care home.

To me, Ms Power's back story is important in the context of what is happening at Lyndoch now:

an extraordinary number of [staff that have left](#) since 2015, including a string of senior managers and managers,

[allegations of a toxic work environment](#) and;

evidence of staff shortages and [equipment shortages](#) for our aged and frail.

As I wrote on Monday, Ms Power was in charge of Seymour hospital for five years from 2007 to 2012, [before resigning in the face of a virtual uprising within the town](#) over allegations of a toxic workplace, high staff turnover and extremely low staff morale.

Seymour is almost a mirror image of the concerns now leaking out of Lyndoch.

The back story, however, doesn't end there.

After Seymour, Ms Power became CEO of Plenty Valley Community Health, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, but resigned and was replaced by an interim CEO after only 18 months.

Why?

After Plenty Valley, Ms Power was appointed Director of Nursing and Manager of the Clinical Team at the Tweddle Child and Family Health Service – her last position before coming to Warrnambool – but, again, she resigned after a few months.

Why?

I have dug deep into these questions and spoken to many people about this period in Ms Power's career, and a troubling pattern has emerged.

That pattern centres around a particular management style which results in the same allegations: a toxic workplace, low staff morale, high staff turnover and, in the aftermath, the need for a major overhaul and refocus on the organisation's people and core purpose.

For various reasons I am, unfortunately, unable to quote any sources directly for this piece, but I can tell you that up to 60 staff left Plenty Valley Community Health during 2012-2013.

I can also tell you that the issues left behind for the health centre to deal with were complex and draining.



Former Plenty Valley health board director Marcia O'Neill sums it up in her opening line from the 2013-14 annual report, written six months after Ms Power's resignation:

"The past year was one of the most challenging in the history of Plenty Valley Community Health.

"Thanks to the efforts of the Board, our stakeholders and key executive staff during this critical time, the prospects for the future are now very promising," she writes.

Ms O'Neill goes on to say that the appointment of a new CEO (Phillip Bain) saw a sound foundation of executive management and loyal staff and a move back to "business as usual".

Phillip Bain also gave a blunt assessment in the 2014-15 annual report of what Plenty Valley health looked like when he

took charge:

“The Plenty Valley that I joined in early August was a much less confident organisation than the one we see today.

“We had a backlog of productivity, infrastructure and policy issues to address.

“We also had very low levels of staff morale arising from changes in senior management, and had missed out on many opportunities for growth or building partnerships in the years prior.”

One source told me that when Mr Bain took over, it was like Plenty was “being liberated”.

Mr Bain goes on to list 25 main areas of change under his watch, including a new strategic plan, a review of financial reporting, and a “dramatic improvement” in staff morale, absenteeism and staff retention.



The Plenty Valley Community Health 'super clinic' that opened during Ms Power's time with the centre. A similar medical centre is planned for Lyndoch Living.
Image: PVCH

Did the Lyndoch board, as it was in 2014 when Ms Power was appointed, know about any of this?

If it did, what impact, if any, did it have on the board's choice of Ms Power as the best person to guide Lyndoch into the future?

Apparently Ms Power was chosen from 20 applicants, but I am not sure who was on the selection panel. (I emailed chair Kerry Nelson about all this today, but she is on leave until 19 December.)

Lyndoch Living is a very different place under Ms Power's reign and there is no doubt some changes to Lyndoch were necessary, but what has also happened is a growing culture of silence, with staff too scared to speak up and the public not

encouraged to ask questions.

On the ground, the Lyndoch staff have been threatened with disciplinary action if they make any comments on social media that are considered unacceptable by management, and especially if they comment on The Terrier.

I have heard a list of names has been taken, which explains the lack of comments from Lyndoch staff on anything I write (don't worry, I see you).

The [lack of information at the last Lyndoch AGM](#) also showed the disregard for wider community input into Lyndoch's direction.

I am starting to wonder if Lyndoch, which was started by the community, supported by the community and is still accountable to the community, is turning into Leningrad.

How this has happened, and what we can do about it, is where this story goes next.

More soon.

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