

## Sister Elizabeth Kenny (1880 - 1952)



Portrait of Sister Elizabeth Kenny, ca. 1917. John Oxley Collection, State Library of Queensland neg No 171668.

Elizabeth received no formal training as a nurse. She started her career by volunteering her services to anyone who called her for help, riding on horseback from her family home on the Darling Downs. She furthered her experience serving as a nurse during World War 1.

After returning home to Australia, she worked with a Toowoomba surgeon to treat cases of polio with hot baths and limb movement, instead of the immobilisation methods used by doctors at the time. Many of her patients experienced a healthy recovery.

The first two polio treatment centres established by Elizabeth were funded by the Queensland Government. These clinics in Townsville and Brisbane attracted overseas patients.

She later opened clinics in other states and was financed by the New South Wales Government to present her clinical methods to doctors in the United States.

In 1937, a polio epidemic struck Australia and Elizabeth published a book about her treatments. In 1940, Elizabeth was invited to the United States to work at the University of Minnesota where she started a training school for therapists.

A wave of polio outbreaks hit America during the Second World War Years. In 1946, Minneapolis suffered its worst polio epidemic with the death of over 2,000 people. Elizabeth's ideas were recognised as the best treatment during those times and was said to have saved the country from a national disaster.

The University of Southern Queensland administers the Sister Elizabeth Kenny Memorial Fund providing scholarships for nursing students on placement in rural or remote areas of the state.