

Nursing role expands

Natalie Dragon

PATIENTS with cancer and other chronic conditions will benefit from quicker access to treatment, with two nurses in the area now registered to prescribe medication.

Kangaroo Ground resident Karen Conte and Julie Paul, of Macleod, are two of only eight nurse practitioners in Victoria. The qualification allows them to prescribe medication, make referrals to specialists and send patients directly to hospital from home under their direction.

The palliative care nurses were part of a seven-year project by the Nurses Board of Victoria to get the qualification established and recognised. It requires five years' clinical experience and a masters degree in a specialty, as well as a portfolio showing performance at an advanced level.

Ms Conte and Ms Paul, who became nurse practitioners last October, each have more than 20 years' nursing experience and have worked for Banksia Palliative Care's home visiting service for 12 years.

Ms Conte said their new advanced nursing role was very different to that of a doctor.

"We prescribe medi-



We prescribe medication only for palliative care patients from a limited drug formulary.

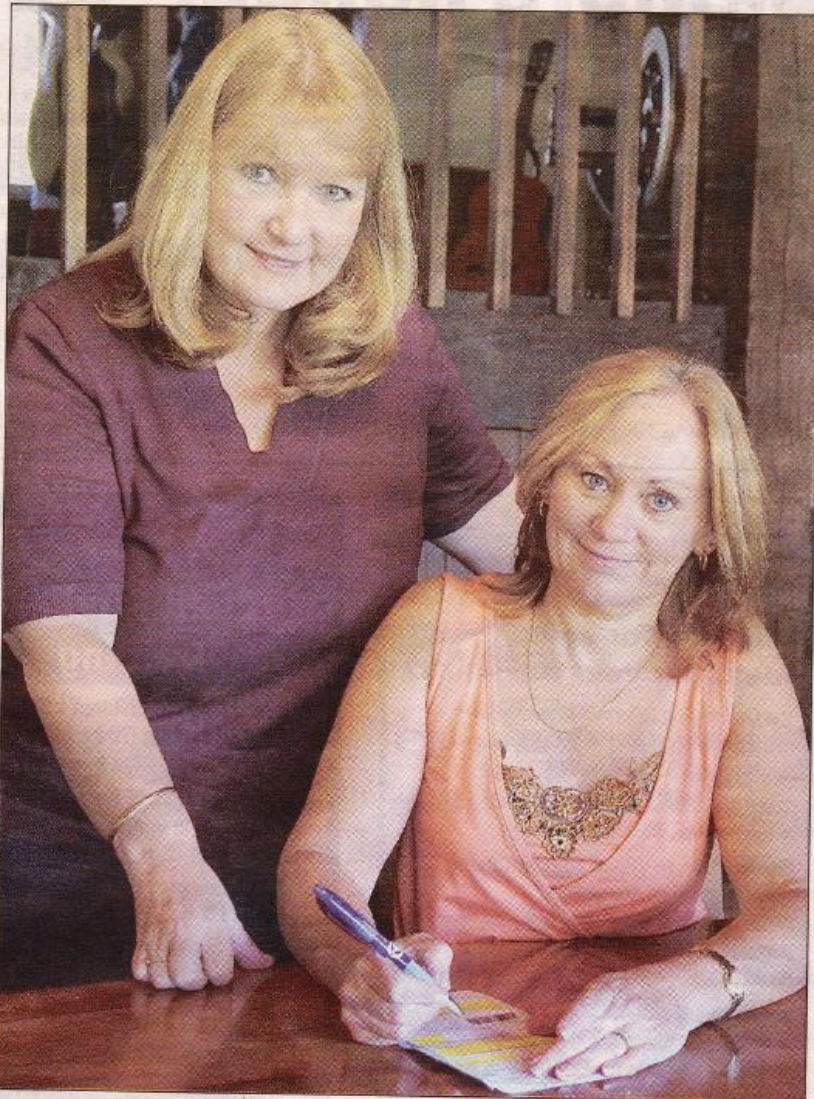
KAREN CONTE

cation only for palliative care patients from a limited drug formulary," Ms Conte said. "We differ from a GP who prescribes for any patient with any condition."

She said the increased role for specialist nurses benefited patients.

"We have more contact with patients and being able to write them a prescription saves them having to make a trip to their GP who often only gets time at the end of the day," Ms Conte said. "It makes it a lot quicker for patients and helps them to control their symptoms quicker."

Ms Paul said the nurses visited people at home and those in nursing homes. "It is mainly end-stage cancer patients but we have a lot more people coming through with chronic conditions," she said.



Palliative care nurses Julie Paul and Karen Conte.