



st mary's women

## SONYA DOUGLAS ('84) Dietician



*"My job has fulfilled and exceeded my dreams."*

My career as an Accredited Practising Dietitian has taken me on a journey of personal and professional growth that has been the best decision of my life. Graduating in 1984 from St Mary's was a time of indecision and uncertainty in terms of forging a career path. I started with an interest in and respect for the human body, coupled with an above average performance in maths and chemistry. Understanding the prerequisites for these subjects for university entry into a career in health was what I started with. The decision about which area I loved was not initially obvious, although topping the class in Food and Nutrition throughout high school should have been the sign. I decided to study at UWA which, when I reflect back, was influenced by my friends who chose to study at this more prestigious campus, albeit the majority in economics and commerce. Attending most lectures with no familiar faces, after graduating from my very protected private girls' school education, I felt lonely and isolated.

After completing my first year in a Bachelor of Arts course, with a science focus, I came to realise that I needed to graduate from a course that gave me a specific versus generalist title as a health professional. I decided to transfer to Curtin University the following year to enrol in the three-year Bachelor of Applied Science (Nutrition and Food Science) where I graduated as a nutritionist. I then completed the Graduate Diploma in Dietetics which entitled me to work as a clinical dietitian in a hospital setting. From graduation in 1989 I never looked back. In a tough economic market, very similar to now, I was very fortunate to secure

one of two jobs in Perth as a clinical dietitian at Hollywood Repatriation Hospital where I worked for two and a half years. I then resigned and established my own private practice, Dietwise Nutrition Clinics and opened up four clinics across Perth, employing five dietitians after three years.

A degree in nutrition has afforded me amazing and diverse opportunities — FIFO offshore worksite health programmes, corporate nutrition, preparing residential aged-care facilities for accreditation, providing telephone consultations nationally for AIA Insurance, lecturing at Curtin University on private practice, talks to sports teams, radio interviewing, blog contributions, senior clinical supervisor and mentor to students and new graduates, consultant to the Mental Health Unit at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, and consultant to hospitality and catering companies. I most recently secured the position as job share, Head of Department at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

If you have a love of food and a strong background in science, and wish to inspire and counsel individuals to optimise health outcomes and prevent or manage nutrition-related disease, becoming an Accredited Practising Dietitian is the job that has fulfilled and exceeded my dreams.

