

THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY MEDAL (N.Z.B.M.)

Karen Ruth FOSTER

Date of action: 4 January 1992

Date of award: 23 October 1999

Citation

In the early evening of 4 January 1992 a fire broke out in Otipua Block at Talbot Hospital, Timaru. Mrs Chapman, a hospital aide, Mrs Foster and Mrs McCrea, both staff nurses, calmly ensured that all patients were safely evacuated. Mrs Chapman and Mrs McCrea were on duty in Otipua Block when the fire broke out. With no regard for personal safety, Mrs Chapman and Mrs McCrea removed the three patients in the room where the fire started. Immediately after the patients were removed, the windows exploded. Black smoke in the room was down to eye-level at this time. Mrs Chapman continued to remove patients, while Mrs McCrea advised Mrs Foster, on duty in the other building, of the fire, and closed smoke stop doors. Eleven patients were evacuated by the three women before the fire brigade and police arrived. They then assisted with the evacuation of the remainder of the 35 patients by repeatedly entering the smoke-filled building until all were safely removed. All three women were in danger from smoke-inhalation. Mrs Chapman and Mrs McCrea, in the initial stages of the rescue, were in danger of being burnt by the flames, lacerated by shattering glass, and trapped by possible ceiling collapse. The actions of Mrs Chapman, Mrs Foster and Mrs McCrea, helped avert what could have been a major tragedy.