

Education Matters: International Nurses Day: Cause for Celebration

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We recently celebrated International Nurses Day on 12th May, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has been celebrating this date since 1965 and it is now celebrated throughout the world. Different countries celebrate the occasion in different ways, with some celebrating the day itself whilst others celebrate a whole week. The ICN identifies a theme each year and the theme for 2018 is: Nurses A Voice to Lead – Health is a Human right. This theme is particularly aligned to the framework for nurses and midwives *Leading Change, Adding Value* (NHS England 2016) in England, to integrate health and social care services, increase the adoption of prevention, enhance the quality of care and, through efficiencies, make the most of our resources. Whilst recognising that nurses, midwives and care staff bring considerable value by safeguarding the focus on quality, the triple aim of this framework is to identify measures in all three areas to improve patient outcomes, their experiences and to create efficiencies.

For the UK, this year is even more special. The UK celebrates the 70th anniversary of the NHS, the institution of which our nation is most proud and is the envy of the world. With nurses making up the largest workforce within the NHS, this year offers us an opportunity to reflect on what has happened in the profession and what the future might hold. As an educationalist, I would argue that education has made the most significant difference to nursing as a profession. Education has enabled nurses to sit comfortably alongside its allied health professions colleagues and contribute meaningfully to the interprofessional team.

In February this year, I wrote about my own reflections on the past 50 years in nursing and just what a difference education has made to the profession (Rosser 2018a). Indeed, the RCN (2012) lists the historical development of nursing education, with almost 80 years ago, the Athlone report (1939) recommending nurses in training having student status. It was not until 1989 and the outcome of Project 2000 (UKCC 1986) that nurses gained student status, some 50 years after the initial proposal to allow students time to be educated rather than trained. It was then almost 25 years later that nurses become an all-graduate entry in September 2013. It has been a long journey but now, nurses are making the most of their education by promoting and contributing to the development of evidence based practice and providing that evidence base to achieve the triple aim of the nurses and midwives framework (NHS England 2016). Nurses have been instrumental in reshaping services and reforming their whole career structure. Now, at one end of the continuum, the newly proposed Nursing Associates will require a foundation degree to succeed, whilst, at the other end, masters level study will be the minimum requirement for advanced clinical practitioners. Most importantly, degree level nurses do make a significant impact on patient care. The work of Aiken (2014) demonstrates that each 10% increase in the proportion of degree level nurses in hospitals is associated with a 7% decrease in patient mortality. Education does matter.

Not only has the profession made significant changes in the UK, it is contributing to the wider healthcare agenda on the global stage. The launch of the *Nursing Now* campaign earlier this year (Rosser 2018b) recognises the significance of the nurses role in addressing health and care challenges across the world. It aims to be a voice for the profession in improving the world's health as well as contributing to gender equality and economic development (Cummings 2018). However there is much to be done in such a tight time line and we look

forward to celebrating its success in 2020 and the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth.

Back in the UK, nurses continue to struggle with an impoverished workforce. However, in spite of such shortages, which has become a global issue, nurses have retained their professionalism and continue to lead with expert care and compassion. To address the acute shortages, Cummings (2018) announced a major recruitment and retention campaign as part of the NHS's 70th year celebrations. As professionals ourselves, we can be instrumental in spreading the word and busting the myths about what nursing is and what it is not.

So, during the symbolic celebrations in Westminster Abbey in London for International Nurses Day, a symbolic lamp is taken from the Nurses' Chapel in the Abbey and handed from one nurse to another, and then to the Dean, who places it on the High Altar. This signifies the passing of knowledge from one nurse to another. The development of nursing knowledge by nurses for nurses is a direct result of the impact of education on the emerging profession, something Nightingale would have been proud of. We have indeed lots to celebrate. Nevertheless, each one of us has a role to play in moving ever forwards and enhancing quality and improving efficiencies.

References

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