

Let's hear it for the Nurse

A message from the Chief Nurses of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Nursing has come a long way since the days of caps, capes, cuffs and cycles; when nurses worked mainly in the local community or hospital and were seen as the doctor's handmaiden. Although many things within our profession have changed and will continue to change, there are common values and principles to good nursing practice that remain unchanged. They are care, compassion, dignity, and respect for the people we work with and care for everyday.

Advances in science and technology and the changing health needs of our populations have seen nursing roles changing dramatically over time. Nursing today is a very broad church made up of over 600,000 registrants in the UK alone, from many different social and cultural backgrounds. Nurses work with people across the lifespan in a variety of care settings and in roles that cover the whole spectrum of health and illness. Our challenge is to build on the values of our long history of service and care and develop nursing for the rest of the 21st century and beyond.

The theme for International Nurses Day (12th May 2014) is *Nurses: A Force for Change - A Vital Resource for Health*. "As the largest group of health professionals, who are the closest and often the only available health workers to the population, nurses have a great responsibility to improve the health of the population..." (Judith Shamian, President of the Internal Council of Nurses 2014).

Nurses are clinicians and carers and also, and increasingly, educator's, counsellors, advocates, researchers and improvers, system navigators, care coordinators or case managers for an individual's family, groups, communities and populations. As you might expect, a rich professional landscape like this brings tremendous career opportunities. We expect to see increasing numbers of nurses choosing to work in roles that focus on keeping people healthy and well by empowering people to manage their own health and lifestyle or on preventing people becoming ill through anticipatory care, as well as during times of ill-health: think of the health visitor public health nurses and school nurse who take children through infancy to young adulthood, the specialist Children's Mental Health Learning/intellectual disabilities nurses who support those with additional health and care needs to live normal lives; the practice nurses who everyday provide day to day primary care, the community nurses who help those with one or more long term conditions manage in their own homes and the occupational health nurses who support us back to work. There will always be the need for nurses who care for people following trauma, illness or in life threatening situations and there will be

increasingly technical and technology enabled roles both inside and outside hospitals, in ambulance services, community health centres or with the armed forces.

The demographic profile of our countries means that the vast majority of our nurses will work with older people, helping them to live longer, more fulfilling lives in their homes or a homely setting, providing high quality care when hospital is needed and providing dignified compassionate end of life care in all settings.

Nor should we forget those nurses who may not practice 'hands on care' but who are still committed nurses in professional leadership and government roles, in professional or employee associations, in service leadership and management, and in research and teaching.

In order to meet the demands of contemporary practice, the levels of knowledge and skills required by nurses in all these roles have been expanded to include some that were previously the domain of medicine, such as prescribing of medication, providing psychological therapies, management of minor or specialist illnesses or providing chemotherapy and other advanced interventions independently. This is why nurses today have higher level education as well as care and compassion in order to protect the public. It also brings them in line with comparable professions, such as physiotherapists, teachers and social workers.

There is more change on the way for our profession. The financial crisis has brought into sharp focus the imbalance between the population's demand of health care and the resources available. The changing demographic profile means that we can no longer operate in the same way and more nurses will start their careers in community, primary care or public health roles. They will work in the voluntary or the independent sector and in integrated teams with social care, educators and others. They will spend more time preventing, supporting and facilitating people to self-care and avoiding ill health, as well treating it. The nurse patient relationship will be an equal and active partnership that focusses on strengths, self-care and support.

The Chief Nurses of the UK and ROI are very privileged to lead our profession at this time of huge challenge and opportunity. We fully support the theme of International Nurses Day and together we must be that "Force for Change and A Vital Resource for Health."

Ros Moore, Chief Nursing Officer for Scotland

Jean White, Chief Nursing Officer for Wales

Charlotte McArdle, Chief Nursing Officer for Northern Ireland

Viv Bennett, Director of Nursing, Department of Health and Public Health England

Jane Cummings, Chief Nursing Officer, England

Siobhan O'Halloran, Chief Nursing Officer for the Republic of Ireland