



From Florence Nightingale's insistence on greater sanitation in hospitals, to Mary Eliza Mahoney's work raising the status of African-American nurses in 19th Century United States, to Margaret Sanger's tireless advocacy for women's reproductive health, the roots of modern nursing lie in the care and activism of individuals.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the importance and skill of nursing, and the heroism of nurses, into sharp focus as they carry out their invaluable work in treacherous circumstances.

Right now, global healthcare institutions feel far from safe, available and funded. Insulin price wars rage in America. There is a fatal lack of medical access in Brazil's favelas. Big Pharma is racing to make a profit from Covid-19 vaccinations. There are global inequities in nursing pay and conditions.

These are systemic issues - issues that, in our inflamed political, economic and environmental climate - can feel intractable and impossible to solve. But within these systems are the individuals still doing the hard, thoughtful, compassionate work of nursing.

These are the healers, the miracle-makers, the witnesses and sages of birth and death and the stages in-between. Like the nurses who came before them, they are the reasons to be hopeful about the future and the potential for change. Violet has talked with nurses working on the frontline of the Covid-19 crisis, to find out what it means, and what it takes, to be a nurse.

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—LLOYD

LLOYD, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

Do you have something that gets you through the day if you are having a stressful time?

A quote from one of my favourite authors, Audre Lorde: ‘Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.’

What is the most memorable thing a patient has said to you?

‘I want a white nurse.’ But also, ‘The NHS won’t survive without Filipino nurses like you.’

What has been the most challenging thing for you during the coronavirus crisis?

Living in a foreign country and thinking of my family back home where we have challenging social conditions—where physical distancing may be an impossibility, regular hand-washing can be a luxury, and being away from work means losing your source of income.

What has been the most enlightening thing you’ve found in the crisis?

As a nurse, I feel very proud of the resilience healthcare workers are all demonstrating and how we are adapting to the changes taking place all over the world. I have never been this proud to be in the frontlines.

Moreover, in my capacity as a clinical research nurse, I am incredibly grateful to have the privilege to be on clinical and research service during these challenging times. The courage, commitment and resourcefulness of the entire healthcare team under difficult circumstances has been nothing short of inspiring.

What is your dream for the future of the National Health Service?

When this pandemic is over, I hope the NHS will not forget the structural and systemic issues around workforce gaps and public health funding. The spread of Covid-19 reveals where investments in workforce development haven’t been made.

The World Health Organization’s State of the World Nursing Report 2020 shows that nursing shortages will persist through to 2030 without additional investment in education and employment. It’s not too late to correct this. We need policies, opportunities and the will to make it happen.

Investment in healthcare workers worldwide is a benefit to society, not a cost. It will save millions of lives, enhance global health security and result in massive economic and social returns.

Furthermore, the NHS should always take an intersectional approach when building health programs and pandemic responses. Governments also need to develop and implement health financing mechanisms that demand gender equality and human

rights as a key component of ‘Health for All’.

What other nurse has changed your view of the world?

Other research nurses, who inspired me to be one! I think it is important that when we talk about nurses, we need to go beyond the ‘traditional’ roles. Nurses are on the frontlines, but they are also advancing health and safety as researchers, advocates, leaders, innovators and communicators. It is very timely that 2020 marks the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife—an opportunity to amplify the essential role of nurses and midwives around the world.

Do you have any key health tips for readers?

Be kinder to yourself—that doesn’t need a doctor’s prescription.

What would make your job easier?

Excellent staffing!



DORCAS, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

Do you have something that gets you through the day if you are having a stressful time?

It is very important to recognise stress before it gets out of control as it can impact on one's emotional and mental health. I become easily irritable when I am very stressed, so it is vital I take a break, which helps me to recharge so I can continue having the capacity to give to others.

I would normally take a 30-minute break in the fresh air—that normally clears my head and gets me ready to go back into the hospital.

What is the most memorable thing a patient has said to you?

Just before lockdown, a patient asked me to be a witness to their wedding. I remember crying with joy and sadness. This was a patient who was at the end of their life, and the thought of losing such a person was tough, especially when you've built a personal relationship with them.

This is a part of an email I received from the patient...

'Can we both thank you for being our witness, the photos and the card! You truly are a star in the NHS system, and life in general.'

What has been the most challenging thing for you during the coronavirus crisis?

I have never felt sadness and isolation like I did during the coronavirus crisis. I was redeployed to an NHS [National Health Service] Nightingale hospital [critical care temporary hospitals set up by the NHS in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in England]. I wanted to protect my family while I worked there, so I moved out into a hotel for six weeks.

No one is ever prepared to work in an environment where you're in full PPE. Every day is different—challenging yet rewarding. There were days when I was sad, fearful and anxious, but when you are a nurse you show up and do your job—not because it is a job, but because I think every nurse has a passion for compassionate care. This is the reason we show up and we do our jobs well.

What has been the most enlightening thing you've found in the crisis?

That in the midst of uncertainty and fear everyone was able to pull together and look after each other's needs. The nation came together to appreciate the NHS, which to me epitomised what unity really means within a society. The celebration of nursing has shown a renewed respect for my profession and peoples' understanding of my role.

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—DORCAS

What made you become a nurse?

Growing up, my family always said I embody my name, which means 'kind'. Dorcas is a biblical name. In the Bible, she was a woman who sewed clothes for the poor, and she had a compassionate heart.

Prior to deciding my career, my mother played an important role in my choice. She highlighted my attributes and it demonstrated most of the characteristics of a nurse. Being a nurse is such an interesting career. The beauty of it is that no two days are the same. I love my job and I'm glad I am in a career where I can impact peoples' lives. Nursing for me is not a job, it is a longing. A desire to make a change to those in need.

What health ritual do you live by?

I pray and I meditate. I track my water intake. A bedtime routine (going to bed between 9.30pm and 10pm). A gratitude list. Going for fresh air. Giving yourself the time and the space to eat mindfully.

Do you believe in God? Or a God?

Yes, I am Christian and believe in Jesus. I am able to cast all my anxiety and fear to God. I am reassured that there is someone who knows my every need and cares for me.

If you had to nominate one person you work with as an icon who would it be?

I would find it difficult to nominate just one. Currently, two of my colleagues and friends have faced the same difficult situations, on top of working throughout Covid-19. They have remained professional, kind and dedicated to their patients and colleagues, and are a constant support. I admire how they have stepped up in a time of conflict and have remained dignified and caring.

