



Be ready for unprecedented times – 31 years in NHS nursing

Oluwafunmilayo Elizabeth Ayodeji is a Registered General Nurse, an Independent Prescriber and holds a BSC in Clinical Nursing. Elizabeth retired last week and has written this reflection on her time in general practice for International Nurses Day 2021, which is today, 12 May.

I started nursing in 1979 and spent the first ten years of my career in Nigeria, before moving to the UK to practice for thirty-one and a half years. My work has given me experience of both acute and community settings within the NHS.

From 2003 until my retirement on 2 May 2021, I had the privilege of working in general practice. I have been through the ranks of staff nurse, ward sister and up to nurse prescriber, specialising in minor illness management, diabetes, asthma, COPD and all other core duties within general practice. Supporting other nurses in general practice is important to me. I was able to set up a group for nurse prescribers which provides peer support and education for members within Barnet, with the help from one of the nurse leaders in the borough. I am proud to say the group has expanded enormously and has been one of the main lifelines for many of us during the pandemic.

With so much guidance to take in, the group's members helped each other by flagging new information so that we were all be aware of what we needed to know. This included highlighting resources to support our own mental health which became very important during the pandemic. We also shared queries on difficult consultations, to get advice from each other.

When the vaccine became available many of us had questions about it, including how the safety checks were completed so quickly. Once again colleagues helped to share information and resources, including how we could access vaccinations as frontline healthcare workers.

During my training as a student nurse, we were told to always be ready for any eventuality or new challenge, but nothing could have prepared me for the pandemic we are facing. Before Coronavirus, telephone consultation made up about 5% of my patient contacts and video consultation were 0% of my work! But both ramped up to 100% within a few days of the pandemic hitting London. I learned quickly how to adapt to this new situation and provide for each patient's needs.

The ability to switch to video for a consultation helps in some very practical ways, such as examining someone's tonsils or demonstrating the correct inhaler technique. However, it also helps in subtler ways, such as being able to see the expression on a patient's face that shows they understand what they have been told or observe physical cues, such as becoming short of breath during conversations. Many patients also value the flexibility of being able to consult without having to travel to the practice.

It was not all plain sailing but with the assistance of a great administrative support, a brilliant clinical team, and a superbly cooperative patients I was able to pull it off. I also worked from home at times, which made me feel safe from catching the virus. This especially matters because the BAME community, to which I belong, is disproportionately affected by the diseases. However, I did miss the face-to-face interaction aspect with my patients and colleagues.

My advice for those coming into nursing, or who are continuing with nursing services, is to be ready and available to embrace changes and challenges as unprecedented times may arise when you least expect. Whatever situation they find themselves, they must uphold the core values of the profession, that is: integrity, promoting social justice for all, being autonomous whilst respecting the contribution of others, maintaining dignity, and promoting the wellbeing of everybody.

Finally, they must ensure that they keep themselves up to date with current developments and look after themselves and their colleagues, both physically and mentally.