



Press Release

Immediate Release

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Nottingham's 'Golden Nurse' on her 50-year Career

A mental health nurse from Nottingham shows no signs of slowing down and says she still has an incredible passion for helping people after a remarkable five-decade nursing career.

Pauline Rees, 68, said her 50 years of nursing has "defined me as a person".

She is currently the Hospital Manager of Cygnet Health Care Aspen House, a rehabilitation high support mental health hospital for women in Rotherham, where she commutes to from her Nottingham home.

She has been at the Cygnet Health Care-run service for ten years and began her career in nursing after she volunteered with the St John Ambulance Brigade at the age of 13.

This ignited her belief that she was destined for a career in nursing.

"I've always considered myself to be caring, and compassionate", she said. "What I wanted to do was make a difference to people's lives, help them get better and have a quality of life."

She started her training in 1974 at Nottingham General Hospital, and by 1980 had qualified as a Registered General Nurse and Registered Mental Health Nurse.

Her career has given her incredible opportunities to do various roles including being a Staff Nurse in A&E, Gynaecology, District Nurse, Matron of a nursing home and she was also fortunate to be the nurse at an orphanage in Tanzania, Africa.

In 1999 she returned to the psychiatric field, working in various low and medium secure services and rehabilitation.

"When I first qualified as a nurse, I was a staff nurse on one of the busiest wards in the Midlands, (Gynaecology). On reflection I believe this is where the foundations of managing busy difficult environments began. It helped me to realise the importance of not only ensuring deliverance of quality of care, but knowing the staff team.

"I did some time as a Theatre Nurse and I was really looking forward to that but it was probably the biggest disappointment as I didn't have the patient contact because they were under anaesthetic. It felt a big loss to me not actually having that communication with patients.

"As part of my training development, I did three months on a psychiatric ward and absolutely loved it. It made me realise I wanted to be there for people who were experiencing their darkest days.

"It is such a privilege when patients trust you with their inner most feelings.

"Mental health nursing is like a jigsaw. By listening, and observing you can begin to understand people, and hopefully gain insight into their behaviour, and why they're saying the things they say."

Talking about how nursing has changed over time, Pauline explained:

"When I told my parents that I wanted to be a nurse, my father's reaction was anger. He said 'I don't want any daughter of mine scrubbing floors'. He felt it was a low class job. He did eventually understand that the role of a nurse had changed, and accepted my choice of work, and I think he was quite proud of me."

Discussing how the role of a nurse has changed positively, Pauline added: "When I first started, it was very strict. For example when the matron came onto the ward, you would have to stand, and bow to her. You would never consider stepping out of line.

"You would have to know the age, name, diagnosis, and treatment plan for every patient, even when there were up to 30 beds on the ward. It was so disciplined.

"Student nurses were the workforce on the wards, you were lucky if there were two support workers on a shift for 40 patients.

"We would be washing patients, bathing them, doing dressings, making beds. Without the student, and pupil nurses (State Enrolled Nurse), the wards would have come to a standstill.

"Nursing has also become a more academic vocation over time, and has moved away from the bedside nursing of interacting with patients and getting to know them.

"People are generally more outspoken these days which can be very positive. For example, mental illness is no longer swept under the carpet, and an unspoken subject. TV, social media, radio and education in schools has definitely promoted some healthier attitudes.

"Psychiatric services have advanced so much since late 1970's when care began to move away from the Asylum. There is now so much more knowledge and advancements in treatments, which has enabled many other positive options to be considered when managing mental illness."

Pauline said her biggest lesson that she emphasises to student nurses is the importance of communication.

"I explain that communication is the greatest and most essential skill, and that I want to see them working directly with patients," she said. "It's good to study, and gain knowledge, but fundamentally we are there to understand, and care for our patients."

She describes her time at Cygnet Health Care has being one of the highlights of her nursing career.

"It has been so rewarding, the team has become very cohesive, skilled, and committed to delivering quality care.

"I never thought I'd end up in people management, but I eventually acknowledged that I was able to motivate staff, through listening, valuing, and using much humour.

"I have always wanted to be involved with patient care so I have the best of both worlds by operating with an open office door. You've got to follow policy and procedure and do things properly, but also care for the patients and make the day enjoyable, and sociable for all. You have to inject humour into the job".

On advice she would offer to nurses in the early stages of their career, Pauline said: "Watch other people. See who manages the patient well, and try their ideas which will help you define your own positive way of working.

"Always treat the person as a whole person. You're not just treating them for a wound. The more you listen to people, the more you can understand how to help them, and create an environment where they hopefully trust you, and will begin work with you, so together you can improve their life.

"I feel it's a huge responsibility but ultimately, you have the tools to make a positive lasting impact.

"It's been quite a journey, like being on a roller coaster, but I would not change a moment of the experience. It has allowed me to reflect, and truly understand myself.

"It's an absolute privilege to work with so many wonderful, knowledgeable, and caring people."

Pauline hopes in the near future to be involved in more voluntary nursing overseas.

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