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We Are Social Care Nursing

In this edition:

- Spotlight on... being a learning disability nurse
- A word from Deborah Sturdy
- Nursing associate and trainee nursing associate national community of practice
- We Are Social Care Nursing conference: Shaping the future of nursing in social care
- NIHR senior nurse leaders programme
- Help IMPACT to make an impact on the way adult social care is delivered
- The NGS Elsie Wagg (Innovation) Scholarship – applications open

This month we're celebrating Black History Month. As part of this, we asked Tolu Olaniyan to share her nursing leadership journey

Spotlight on...

Being a learning disability nurse by Tolu Olaniyan

"Learning disability nursing? What is that?". Those were my first reactions when I was told about learning disability (LD) nursing by my uncle who is the head of the physiotherapy team for people with learning disabilities in a service in Count Kerry, Ireland.



He was (and still is) one of my favourite uncles and I had always wanted to be a physiotherapist like him. I had no cell recognition about what he was talking about or who people with learning disabilities are. I grew up in Nigeria and I never heard of the term or diagnosis of learning disabilities or Autism. I had never met anyone with Down's Syndrome or with any other learning disabilities.

My uncle encouraged me to find out more about it. A few minutes into my search and I was hooked! It opened my eyes to a whole different world that I never knew

existed. I gained admission to the University of Southampton in 2009 to study learning disability nursing and my journey into the learning disability world kicked off from there. This year marks 10 years since I qualified as a learning disability nurse, and I can proudly say that it was one of the best decisions of my life.

While I was on placement as a student nurse, I discovered the world of epilepsy! It dawned on me that a significant number of people with learning disabilities I met on placement had complex health needs with epilepsy being a prevailing condition within the population. Growing up in Nigeria, epilepsy was a condition associated with a lot of myths, misconceptions, and stigma. Very rarely would you find someone that would openly tell you that they have epilepsy or have a relative with epilepsy.

Having a diagnosis of epilepsy for someone with a learning disability can impact on their lives in so many ways negatively. It requires input from a specialist that has the knowledge of both learning disabilities and epilepsy to understand and manage the complex relationship that occurs when you have a diagnosis of both conditions. I was intrigued. I wanted to know more about epilepsy and be able to provide the specialist input required. I decided to specialise in epilepsy. To achieve this, in 2012, I started my postgraduate Masters degree in epilepsy at Kings College London.

One of the benefits that comes with being a registered learning disability nurse is the varying roles we can work in. When I initially qualified as registered learning disability nurse I worked in an inpatient setting with children with neurological disabilities and acquired brain injury. I later worked as a Community LD nurse (CLDN) in a couple of services across Hampshire. It was in my first CLDN role that I started to take on key leadership responsibilities to apply my epilepsy specialist knowledge to support my colleagues to ensure that evidence-based care was provided to people with learning disabilities who also have epilepsy. I was part of the epilepsy nursing steering group who worked on developing the epilepsy pathway for the Trust. This included developing evidenced-based policies, assessment and care planning tools. I also delivered epilepsy training to healthcare practitioners working with people with epilepsy across the Trust.

My passion has always been about care and service improvement. Over time I have applied my skills and knowledge in service development in Hampshire, Midlands and more recently in my management role as the Programme Lead and LAC for the LeDeR Programme with South-East London ICS.

Recognising a global need, I have travelled to several countries to speak and teach on learning disabilities and epilepsy. I started my own organisation Pretola Global Health & Consulting in 2019 to achieve this globally. My goal is to build health and social care capacity to meet the needs of this population globally, with a focus on Low-and-Middle income countries (LMICs).

In January–March 2022, through my organisation we ran the 3rd edition of our free virtual international epilepsy training. This was attended by nearly 300 healthcare practitioners from 36 countries. In the summer of this year, we delivered our first virtual International Neurodevelopmental Disability masterclass. This was well attended by families, charities, and professionals from LMICs.

As a learning disability nurse, I enjoy what I do because I am not limited. My

experiences and skills have prepared me for not just my immediate sphere of influence, but also to have an impact internationally. I would not change it for anything in the world.

A word from Deborah Sturdy

Making research matter everyday

Why does research in social care nursing matter? It is an essential endeavour, providing critical analysis and evidence to validate and improve our practice. It gives us the power and credibility to constructively challenge process and protocol and prove emphatically how social care nursing makes a positive difference in people's lives.



Nonetheless, research is often seen as an “add on” to the work we do. We need to change that mindset.

As leaders, participants or consumers, research remains the golden thread woven through everything we do. It gives us a stronger voice at the table. It allows us to demonstrate, elevate and celebrate the diversity of our amazing care workforce and lobby for further training, support and recognition.

Following the success of the roundtable on social care nursing we held in May this year, we have been emboldened to further shape and develop our research agenda.

We will be launching a webinar series later this Autumn to promote social care nursing research and maintain the momentum already generated. The appositely named CRED (Care Research Education Debate) will be a forum to discuss the big issues in social care with guest speakers. We will share details soon and I'll be delighted if you can join us.

Meanwhile, we are hoping to collaborate further with the [National Institute for Health and Care Research](#) (NIHR). In particular, we want to build interest in the [nursing incubator sites](#), set up to create new ideas, explore new research areas and address specific questions related to our practice.

Elsewhere, care homes and domiciliary care services provide perfect “laboratories” for nursing research. They are, after all, nurse led services and should be at the forefront of developing practice. They can and should make a positive contribution.

I feel it is so important we find ways to create intern opportunities for social care staff to explore nursing research careers. We need to be actively involved in advisory groups, where we can influence the thinking of the system and make sure our views and experiences are at the heart of decision making.

Where we can take a joint professional stand, we should. A unified position provides the wider health and care sector with a clearer understanding of our shared

objectives and interdependencies. That's why the CNO Nursing Strategy must include social care nursing practice as a fundamental tenet.

Colleagues, who are already active participants in research, talk of their learning, reflections and excitement about being part of something which makes a difference, not only to their service but to the wider social care sector. These collaborative approaches influence and shape outcomes through meaningful, grounded research, benefiting all those we support.

We now have an exciting opportunity to work with academic colleagues. In doing so, we can build a strong evidence base, offer new career paths for practice-based researchers and help shape the future of care. Together, let's continue to grow our influence, demonstrate our worth and stand up for social care nursing, wherever it is practiced.

Deborah

Nursing associate and trainee nursing associate national community of practice for social care

Wednesday 5 October | 10:00-11:30 | Via Zoom

We've established a new community of practice specifically for nursing associates and trainee nursing associates working in adult social care. If you're currently working, on placement, or intending to work in adult social care, we'd love you to join us.

It's a fantastic opportunity for peer support and also to share good practice.

[⇒ Book your place](#)

We Are Social Care Nursing conference: Shaping the future of nursing in social care

Thursday 3 November | 10:00 - 15:45 | Via Zoom

This conference is for all the nursing workforce and key stakeholders in social care, to come together and learn about best and innovative practice that can influence and contribute to the future of nursing. We'll also be focusing on workforce issues and sharing examples of ambitious career development.

Our keynote speaker is Deborah Sturdy, Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care, who will set the scene for the day and will be involved in our discussion and panel session about shaping the future of social care nursing.

There will also be an opportunity to join some fantastic breakout sessions covering a wide range of topics.

[⇒ Book your place](#)

NIHR senior nurse leaders programme

Developing the evidence base in adult social care to support decision and challenge ways of working and thinking is a clear commitment of Deborah Sturdy, Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care and Ruth May CNO at NHSE, supporting and driving forward initiatives that help embed research active culture amongst nurses and midwives within own organisation and beyond. Adult social care provides a unique environment for clinical nursing research.

Research needs to answer questions that matter to social care nurse and midwives and people requiring social care. A major new investment to support a new generation of nurse leaders of research just announced. This opportunity provides space and protected time for senior research leaders (SRL) to share their learning across organisations and the wider NHS. The programme will fund each SRL to be seconded for three years at 0.4 WTE, at an Agenda for Change midpoint Band 8/or equivalent level, within a health and/or social care setting.

The first cohort of the programme will run from April 2023 until March 2026. The programme will run on an annual basis, with 15 nurses and midwives recruited to it every year.

The programme developers are very keen to ensure that the 15 senior nurses come from a range of health and social care backgrounds. In order to become one of the 15 Senior Research Leaders (SRLs) you will be an established research leader who has led initiatives and developed strategies designed to promote a research active culture.

If you know of someone in your organisation or network, or you meet the brief yourself, consider applying. There is a webinar on 5 October for applicants to find out more about the programme and ask any questions you may have. To join a webinar please email nursingandmidwifery@nihr.ac.uk.

The deadline for applications is **13:00 on Monday 24 October** and more information can be found on the [NIHR website](#).

Help IMPACT to make an impact on the way adult social care is delivered

IMPACT ('IMProving Adult Care Together') is the new UK centre for implementing evidence in adult social care. They're currently testing a number of different delivery models via pilot projects across different parts of the UK – but all their work is based on learning by doing, on providing practical support in the realities of local services and on using evidence to make a difference to the way people work and to people's lives. Perhaps unlike other sectors, their definition of 'evidence' includes different types of research, the lived experience of people drawing on care and support and their carers, and the practice knowledge of social care staff.

They've been talking to different people who draw on care and support and who work in adult social care across the UK about how best to use the funding they've received to make as much of a difference as possible. As part of this, they'd like to connect with nurses working in adult social care.

If you'd like to find out more about their work and how to get involved, you can sign up for regular updates [via their website](#).

The NGS Elsie Wagg (Innovation) Scholarship – applications open

This scholarship programme is a joint programme between the Queen's Nursing Institute and the National Garden Scheme. They're looking for nurse-led projects in the community and social care that use gardens and gardening to benefit people's physical, mental or emotional health. Individual support and funding of up to £5000 for each successful project is available.

Applications must be received by **28 October** and interviews will be held online on 18 January 2023 for projects that start in March.

⇒ [Submit your application](#)

We'd love to hear from you

We Are Social Care Nursing is to highlight and showcase what is going on in nursing, to give a voice to the nurses and nursing associates who are working in social care, and for colleagues to better understand the complexity of nursing roles.

We'd like the content to be led by the workforce to show what is happening on the ground and in reality, and so if you'd like to contribute by writing about a topic of your choice, maybe something that is particularly important to you, please email SocialCareNursing@skillsforcare.org.uk

You can also get in touch via social media using #WeAreSocialCareNursing and tagging @skillsforcare

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