

QNI celebrates Nurses' Day with Florence Nightingale's support for district nursing



The Queen's
Nursing Institute

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The Queen's Nursing Institute is marking Nurses Day 2010, 100 years since the death of Florence Nightingale, by releasing material from its archives about Miss Nightingale's impact on district nursing, and highlighting the challenge that her standards present to today's policies and practices on community nurse qualifications.

'Everyone knows of Florence Nightingale's work in hospitals, with army nursing, and in the development of the profession generally,' comments QNI Director Rosemary Cook. 'But not so many people are aware that she was a life-long adviser to William Rathbone on the training, work and deployment of district nurses.'

Comments from Florence Nightingale about district nursing, from her letters and books, will be posted on the QNI's award-winning website www.districtnursing150.org.uk, set up last year to mark 150 years of district nursing.

Florence Nightingale made several observations on the selection, preparation and training of district nurses which, according to the Institute, are a challenge to some of today's policymakers and employers. Reviewing a draft article on district nursing, she wrote: 'It is needless to say that a district nurse must be even a better trained nurse than a hospital nurse, because she has so much less help at hand. There must be nothing of the amateur about her. She has not the doctor always at hand.'

'Florence Nightingale didn't mince her words', Ms Cook comments. 'Today we have a decade-long decline in the number of trained district nurses, to fewer than 10,000, and a more than 100% increase in the number of health care assistants in the community. There should be acknowledgement that community nursing requires specific and high-level skills.'

In response, the QNI's recent Position Statement calls for proper recognition of community qualifications, standards for qualifications to be set by commissioners and publicized by provider organizations, and other measures to protect the quality of nursing care at home. Responses to the statement have been very positive, with one nurse contacting the QNI to say: 'The most positive thing I have heard in a while. Community nursing is very much under pressure and, in my opinion, continues to be very much undervalued.'

'Somebody once said that, if Florence Nightingale were walking the hospital corridors today, she would be looking for the person in charge,' adds Ms Cook. 'I suspect that, if she were driving around the community, she would be asking where all the district nurses have gone. It would be a wonderful way to celebrate Florence Nightingale's achievements if this was the year we reversed the trend, and increased the number of community specialist nurses.'

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Notes to Editors

1. The Queen's Nursing Institute is the charity dedicated to improving the nursing care of people in their own homes, by influencing healthcare policy and by developing Queen's Nurses to lead by example.
2. The QNI's Position Statement can be viewed here: <http://www.qni.org.uk/userfiles/file/Position%20Statement%20March%202010.pdf>
3. Images of Florence Nightingale and William Rathbone are available from the QNI.

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