

International Recruitment to the Community CASE STUDY

2023/#2



Interview with Maritess (Tess) Murdoch

I trained and qualified as a nurse in the Philippines. I was in my 20s in 1999 when I left home to work in the UK. My destination was Turnbridge Wells, Kent. I worked in a surgical ward in a Kent hospital for 18 months. However, I never enjoyed working in a hospital and it had always been my aim to work in the community.

One day I saw an advert in the RCN magazine: a community nurse was needed in Inner North London. I did not know anyone in London, nor did I have any knowledge about community nursing in London. I threw caution to the wind and applied for that job. I never looked back. Community nursing was a whole new world to me, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I found my niche. It was where I flourished as a nurse. I felt that my managers and the NHS organisations around that time provided opportunities for me to develop personally and professionally. I was encouraged to aim for bigger roles. However, I have also experienced challenges and racial discrimination.

Eventually, I applied for a sponsorship to be a specialist practitioner in district nursing at King's College London and I qualified in 2004. I became a Band 7 team leader and managed a team in the district nursing service. However, as I wanted to widen my horizon and venture out of North London, I found a job in East London as

a Band 8a community matron. Working in East London gave me a whole new perspective with different challenges, barriers, and overt racism along the way.

Additionally, as part of the holistic care I provided to my patients, I became an independent nurse prescriber. I believed that prescribing was an integral part of my work. As a nurse prescriber, I knew my limitations, when not to prescribe and to seek medical opinion and advice. My colleagues and I received support and guidance from our respective GPs. I was also involved in the virtual ward which was created to provide holistic care to patients in the community and reduce hospital admissions.

In 2008, I became involved with the WSD(Whole System Demonstrator programme) funded by the Department of Health. It was the largest randomised trial to look at the clinical and cost effectiveness of telehealth across three sites. The study focused on three COPD, diabetes, and heart failure, and how technology could help

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Above: Tess with some plants for her Elsie Wagg Innovation Scholarship Project, 'Project GARDEN: Grow, Active, Recharge, Develop, Enrich, Nurture'.



improve patient's lives. We promoted self-management and empowered patients to look after themselves. Anecdotally, the trial changed our patients and their carer's lives. Earlier findings showed that telehealth, if used correctly, could save lives and help plan care for people with long-term conditions. It changed the way I looked at technology. At the same time, I also worked as a Band 8a deputy lead in the district nursing service in the same borough.

However, between 2013 to 2014, I made two major decisions which have had an impact on my career and dramatically changed the direction I was heading. I made those decisions because I wanted to focus on my health and wellbeing. First, I left my top Band 8a community matron job to be a Band 7 district nurse in North London, and secondly after several months I left the district nursing post and worked in a nursing home.

Working in a nursing home was an eye opener and a major turning point in my nursing career. I found out care home residents in some boroughs did not receive the same access to services compared to the community. The care home staff I met were kind, caring and committed. But they were also isolated, under pressure, devalued, demoralized, and unsupported by their company and external services. Their work was very critical to the lives

of many vulnerable people and their families. It created an inspiration and a determination in me to be involved in improving residents' lives in care homes and improve education and training for staff. In addition, this role became a catalyst for my decision to focus on care of the older people and go back to the NHS. Consequently, I found a job with the Clinical Commissioning Group as a quality assurance nurse in care homes for older people in North London.

As a result of my interest in the care of older people, I embarked on a three-year part time study, and completed my Masters of Science in Global Issues in Ageing and Gerontology in 2020 at the University of Stirling. My studies were funded for two years by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Foundation. Additionally, I became a member of the RCN Older People Forum Steering Committee.

In 2021, I started another role as a nurse educator with the NCL Training Hub to support care homes in upscaling the remote monitoring technology and to provide an educational programme to social care staff. Around that time, I also applied for the QNI Elsie Wagg Innovation Scholarship in which I was successful.

I am also the recipient of the Mona Grey RCN Foundation Impact Award 2022 for Professional Development.

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