

Ambassadors rebrand



With the *Nursing Standard's* 'Nursing the Future' campaign in full swing, *Cancer Nursing Practice* spoke to two cancer nurse ambassadors, **Andy McGovern** and **Marjorie Small**, about what they hope to achieve

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A recent MORI poll of over 2000 British adults found that just 15 per cent of 15-24 year olds would consider becoming a nurse, while an astonishing 20 per cent think that qualified nurses have no formal nursing qualifications at all. with

While the social status of nursing in the UK is improving, albeit slowly, the survey reveals that the public does not have a clear understanding of what nurses actually do everyday and that nursing work is undervalued by many. Furthermore, despite newspaper reports about nurses being given prescribing powers, just 27 per cent of people surveyed think nurses can prescribe medicines. Thus, although the British public seems to have let go of the old nursing

stereotypes of battle-axe and sex siren, the findings indicate that they still have strong misconceptions about nursing.

Nurse ambassadors lead the way

'Nursing the future' is the *Nursing Standard's* year-long campaign to enhance the image and reputation of nursing throughout the UK. By profiling excellence and highlighting some of the many daily success stories of modern day nursing, the campaign is aiming to rebrand the image of nurses for the 21st century.

Twenty three nurse ambassadors were chosen at the start of the year to spearhead the campaign, reflecting the diversity of contemporary nursing. Nurses at the frontline of care provision were

chosen from up and down the country and are charged with spreading the message of what is really happening in local health services, not just hospitals, what nurses are achieving for patients, and how they are shaping healthcare services.

The campaign was launched in February with a lunchtime reception at the House of Commons hosted by Laura Moffett, the Labour MP for Crawley who is a former nurse, specialising in isolation and haematology and one of only three nurse MPs. All MPs who attended the lunch signed a wall pledging their support for the campaign.

Andy McGovern, a nurse on a children's oncology ward at Barts and the London NHS Trust in Whitechapel, talked to *CNP* about his

nursing image



nursing the future



Marjorie small (centre) matron at Heartlands Hospital, Solihull, West Midlands

role as ambassador. 'I think it is a great idea, it should have been thought about years ago. Nurses selling nursing is great. People learning positives about nursing from nurses makes a massive difference. As ambassadors we use the passion we have as nurses, and if our own enthusiasm rubs off on others it will make a huge difference.'

Marjorie Small, matron at Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust is another ambassador with cancer nursing experience. She told *CNP*, 'It is not just about changing the public's perception but also those of colleagues within the trusts from different professions with whom we work side by side – there is a role for us to play there too.'

The campaign has six main goals, to:

- enhance the image and reputation of nursing
- challenge and dispel misconceptions about nursing
- empower nurses to publicise what they do
- raise the public voice and profile of nurses
- encourage more respect for the nursing profession
- encourage nurses to 'sell' or 'talk-up' their professions to future generations.

Recruiting the future

'There is a particular shortage of nurses trained in cancer care,' says Andy. 'I work in a children's cancer ward and it is traditionally easier to recruit nurses into children cancer care compared with adults as people feel they want to devote their career to helping children.' Yet Andy is enthused about all aspects of cancer nursing and loves the patient interaction. 'A lot of people think of death when they hear the 'C' word, but the reality is very different – with combination therapy the cure rate is much higher these days. One of the main blood cancers we treat, a lymphoid leukemia has in excess of an 80 per cent cure rate, so it is actually a very positive and dynamic area of nursing to be involved in, and we really need to get that point across,' he told *CNP*.

Another issue is nurse retention, particularly in London where there is a heavy reliance on agency and overseas nurses. According to Andy, 'Most of the agency nurses have a lot of experience, but since they tend to move around they may not have the chance to build up clinical excellence in a specific area.' He continued, 'We need to get local kids interested in nursing. We have a sixth form college in the area and I plan to go there with the press and try to persuade kids that cancer nursing is a great career option – that nursing is a career move that is worth taking.'

Both Andy and Marjorie hope the campaign can be as successful as a recent initiative in the United States that boosted nursing from ninth

to fourth place in a league table of preferred professions. However, the US campaign had a much larger budget – over \$20 million in corporate sponsorship. 'Of course we could achieve a lot more if we had that kind of money,' says Andy.

Pay and conditions are obvious issues that need addressing in making the profession more attractive to potential new recruits. Both nurse ambassadors agree that the government is trying to do its part to make nursing a more attractive career option. Indeed, the government's 'Agenda for Change' policy sets out a restructured pay package that the government hopes will attract more young people into the profession.

But despite the optimism, Andy remains cautious, 'We want to make sure that all of the money earmarked for 'Agenda for Change' is actually used to fund the increase in pay, and not used instead to make up the shortfall in other areas, for example, funding extra service provision when junior doctor's hours are cut.'

And he thinks it's important to get more men on board; 'I told MPs at the start of the campaign that there should be more men in nursing. Men make up only 10 per cent of nurses and it's a public perception issue – historically the profession has been dominated by women and it takes a long time to change these attitudes and for men to see the profession as something for them. I would like more done to target more men. This was discussed at a recent RCN conference but was rejected because the prevailing view was that by specifically targeting men we would be detracting from the bigger issue which is that we urgently need more nurses, regardless of gender.'

So what was the initial attraction for Andy in cancer nursing? 'There is no doubt about it, it is just so incredibly rewarding to see a child walk out cured. Of course some children do die, but we cure many more. Cancer therapy is a nasty treatment but the smile on a kid's face is the most rewarding thing. While cancer is obviously fright-



Andy McGovern (far right and below): 'the profession has changed greatly' during his working life

ening, with advances in treatment, quality of life is greatly improved. One day we will find ways to cure even more cancers – there is light at the end of the tunnel.'

Another advance in cancer care, says Andy, is how chronic cancer patients can now be managed and treated in the home: 'Obviously, the ideal place for a child to be is at home where they feel comfortable. We have cut the time a child needs to be hospitalised from eight to two days – and part of that success is getting children's services to go out to people's homes. Nowadays cancer nurses often work in an integrated services team, with community and hospital nurses working closely together'

Training the future

Andy and Marjorie believe that the profession has changed greatly during their working life. Marjorie has been nursing for 30 years and received an OBE in the 1999/2000 Honours List for 'Services to Nursing'. 'It was such a surprise to me to be awarded the OBE, I never expected it' She told *CNP* how nursing has changed, 'In cancer nursing nowadays we see patients from diagnosis to treatment, remission or cure, or death. During this time we develop a cohesive, sup-



portive relationship with the patient. More and more we are seeing them return to a normal way of life after treatment, and there is a marvellous sense of achievement and satisfaction associated with that.'

Training needs have also evolved, as Marjorie explains: 'When I began, training was different, and the expectations of carers and patients were different. With the internet and the explosion in information technology, both patients and nurses are now more informed.' She continues: 'If patients' expectations change then training has to change as well. Training standards are a lot higher nowadays and are more evidence based and we are working towards evidence based practice. For example, in cancer nursing much of our work is driven by research and audit, and the dif-

ferent research topics selected by NICE, such as lung cancer, where more patients are being entered into the clinical trials.'

Marjorie believes it is important to highlight how the nurses' role has evolved over time. 'Nurses are becoming trained in procedures traditionally performed by doctors. Many specialist cancer nurses are now trained to carry out diagnostic procedures such as bone marrow aspiration and trephine biopsy. Also, cancer nurses are often highly skilled in the delivery of chemotherapy and cytotoxic drugs.'

Both ambassadors believe that nurses are now encouraged to take on more research projects, audits, and to continue and develop evidence-based practice. Andy has been nursing children for five years, and told *CNP*, 'I have witnessed a big change, even in my time, for example, with the development of more nurse consultants – highly specialised nurses with massive experience in their area of practice who manage patient care in consultation with the doctor. It's now possible to actively pursue a career path where you don't have to leave patient care to get into more senior posts, and that is great.'

Marjorie agrees that there are new ways in which nurses can develop themselves and their

careers, but insists that the importance of the basics should not be underestimated. 'Washing bedpans and the like is at the core of basic care. There are a lot of opportunities to specialise and train, but at the core of nursing we have to maintain the basics, which is what the patient expects of us. It has to be a two-way track – nurses have to take some responsibility for their development – it's got to be a shared approach.'

She also highlights some of the potential difficulties that could arise if nursing becomes too focused on specialism. 'We need to focus on balancing training needs with effective running of the wards; it goes back to not losing sight of the patient in everything we do.'

Making a difference

A key part of the campaign is to get local MPs involved so that they can 'shadow' their ambassador and then return to parliament with a greater awareness of the issues and challenges faced by today's nurses. Andy told *CNP*, 'I met my local MP, Oona King, at the Westminster reception and she has been really supportive of what I'm trying to achieve.'

Andy and Marjorie hope that contact with their MPs will increase as the campaign gathers pace. 'If I had my way, they'd have a nurses uniform on, be washing bed pans and be doing a lot of hands on. I think it would be a bit of a culture shock,' laughs Andy.

Both he and Marjorie hope to get their local media involved in highlighting their cause. Andy has written to his local newspaper, the *Newham Recorder* and plans to contact local radio to try and interest them in a debate about healthcare issues with local MPs and nurses. 'I'd love my MP to see the scope of services we provide here in Newham, and how we work as an integrated services team and how the community nursing team works with the hospital nurses,' he says.

Andy also thinks it would be a great idea for ambassadors and nurses in general to help the government by getting involved in targeted advertising campaigns. As he explained to *CNP*, 'A year ago the government ran a great recruitment campaign with a patient in A&E showing how many healthcare professionals were involved in that patient's care from front door to discharge. It was very effective, and it would

'It would be a fantastic idea for nurses to help government develop nursing ad campaigns'

be a fantastic idea for nurses to help government develop nursing ad campaigns. Plenty of nurses would be willing to help.'

A life-long campaign?

Although the campaign is now in its fourth month, both ambassadors view the initiative as much more than just a year-long effort. 'This campaign is just the start of it,' Marjorie told *CNP*. 'We've been seen as somewhat of a Cinderella profession for too long, and that attitude needs changing. But changing attitudes and perceptions takes time. Nursing is a worthwhile and rewarding profession, and if nurses swapped careers and took up a more nine to five mundane job, I suspect that they would find it hard to accept and would miss their nursing career a great deal.'

So how do Ambassador's juggle the demands of the campaign with their already taxing schedule? Andy says, 'I mainly work on the campaign on my days off so it really isn't a problem. I would love to see this campaign continue and build upon its success.'

Marjorie adds, 'The people at the *Nursing Standard* are really supportive. We have been attending media study days and there are other workshops in the pipeline to help us make

the most of our ambassador roles. Later in the year we all plan to meet up to re-evaluate what we have achieved as ambassadors and where we are going to take the campaign in the future.'

The enthusiasm in Andy's voice is audible when he says, 'It is just great to have the opportunity to make a difference like this. If we get 100 or more new nurses into the profession, particularly from under-represented backgrounds, then that will be fantastic!'

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Dr David Pountney is a freelance writer

■ More information about 'Nursing the Future' can be found at: www.nursing-standard.co.uk/nursingthefuture/content/ntf-intro12-03.html. The campaign can be contacted at: nursingthefuture@nursing-standard.co.uk. Marjorie Small can be contacted directly at marjorie.small@heartsol.wmids.nhs.uk, and Andy McGovern can be contacted at andymcgovern@btopenworld.com. The Members of Parliament associated with Marjorie and Andy are Roger Godsiff (Lab) and Oona King (Lab), respectively. After May 3, Andy McGovern will be in the parliamentary constituency of Tony Banks (Lab).



Lord Corbett and Marjorie Small