

VoxPOPS: “THE MOST MEMORABLE PERSON I HAVE MET AT WORK”

We asked five experts in the field of wound care to describe the person who had made the biggest impression on them while working in the world of wound care, whether it be a patient or a colleague.

“The most memorable person I have met at work is a colleague I worked with for 10 years. Her name is Sandra and she became a mentor to me when I first qualified as a nurse. She took me under her wing and taught me what 3 years of university education could never teach me. Sandra’s skills and nurturing helped me grow and made me into the nurse that I am today.

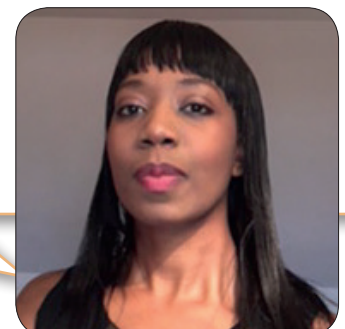
Sandra had been qualified as a nurse for 15 years when I first met her. She was, therefore, very experienced and knowledgeable in her work, and an excellent nurse. She cared for her patients and went the extra mile to make sure that their nursing needs were met in an excellent manner. But Sandra did not stop there. She often went on to speak to patients about their feelings, emotions and any worries they had at the time. She also often spoke to them about their lives, their families and things that were important to them, in a non-obtrusive way. This made patients feel comfortable around her and they often divulged anything troubling them to Sandra

and she would talk them through it and encourage them or advise as best as she could. Patients felt they could trust her and they treated her as a friend.

Sandra also loved her colleagues and often took time out to speak to them about their children and spouses and got to know them well. Anyone that was on long-term sickness or had a bereavement often got a visit and flowers from Sandra.

Sandra will always be memorable to me because she always went that extra mile and made herself available to others, which led them to trust and appreciate her. She taught me the importance of holistic patient care, as well as looking after your colleagues that work alongside with you. I learnt the importance of maintaining and building good relationships everywhere I go and best of all in my nursing career.”

VIOLA SIDAMBE



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“Choosing my most memorable person was really difficult as there have been so many people over the years who have influenced and inspired me, both patients and colleagues. I can think of a number of colleagues who have demonstrated extraordinary commitment and compassion to their patients and fellow colleagues, frequently going the extra mile, and have served as amazing role models for me.

But there are two patients who stand out for me. The first was a gentleman I cared for as a community nurse who had a head and neck tumour. Radical surgery had left him with a discharging, odorous, cavity wound over his lower jaw, impacting on his ability

to swallow and speak clearly. He bore his illness with incredible patience, courage and strength. As a relatively new community nurse it taught me the challenges of managing such a complex wound, but especially the importance of seeing the whole person and not just the wound. Finding a dressing that managed the wound symptoms (pain, odour, exudate) was important, but equally important was the cosmetic appearance and the psychological support he and his wife needed, so that this gentleman could face his family and friends, and even be able to go out in public, making the most of the limited time he had left.

The second, more recent patient was an elderly lady who had an ischaemic foot. Dressing changes were particularly painful experiences, despite gentle handling, pain relief,

non-adherent dressings, and anxiolytic medication. Her vascular consultant had advised that she needed a below-knee amputation, but this lady had full mental capacity and repeatedly refused, quite firmly, to agree to this. She was referred to the palliative care team, but went on to live many more months. We supported her choices, and worked hard to minimise her pain and distress, and she had a peaceful death in the care home where she had lived for many years.

Both of these patients, several years apart in my career, are reminders to me that we are dealing with people, not just wounds; something we all need reminding of at times, however long we have worked for.”

ELIZABETH NICHOLS



“In my line of work, I encounter many memorable people that inspire me on a day-to-day basis, however, when considering who to write about the answer was really under my nose! — Its has to be my healthcare support worker (I have called her Jane here to protect her identity). I first met Jane when she worked part time in one of our leg ulcer clinics when they were set up about 15 years ago. I am so lucky that she decided to take a full-time position with the tissue viability team, five years ago. Every team should have a Jane. She organises all of the qualified staff in clinic, making sure everything is set up correctly and the clinic runs smoothly. She is always happy with a great sense of humour and literally makes me laugh every single day, and is a tonic to the team and to the patients. When patients first attend the clinic she is the first one to put them at ease and gives them much-needed confidence, especially if they are nervous; she even sings to them to relax them before the Doppler test to take their mind off things (although I don't think she will make Britain's got talent anytime soon!). From a professional point of view, she is in charge of our hosiery service

and has a wealth of experience and knowledge in this area she is never afraid to raise concerns that arise which she does promptly and professionally. You will often find her telling the patient off (in a nice way!) when she can see that the patients have not been applying their emollients or using their hosiery. She has a fantastic rapport with the patients and it is such a joy when patients say that they enjoy coming to her clinics. I think we would be lost without her. So here's a big thank you to my lovely healthcare support worker who is very memorable and inspirational.”

KIRSTY MAHONEY



“So many different people have influenced me as a person and a nurse, so who should I choose as the most memorable? Eventually, I decided that it had to be the sister on the postnatal ward when I was a pupil midwife.

I decided to undertake a midwifery course thinking that it would be much easier for me to find work if I had two qualifications. I was accepted to undertake an integrated midwifery course. My school friend was also in the same intake and, being a small group, I thought everything would be great. But I was not happy. I missed general nursing so much and my dislike for midwifery was growing every day. Eventually, I decided that enough

was enough and I was going to give up.

However, I was working on a postnatal ward and just after handover the ward sister asked me to stay behind. Wondering what I had done wrong, I was surprised when she told me that she had heard that I was going to give up midwifery. I had never told anyone how I felt, so had no idea how she knew, but her intervention was going to be a huge turning point for me. She took the time to talk to me and encourage me to stay. She then arranged for a senior pupil midwife to take me under her wing.

I am not saying that everything changed overnight, but things did change. I felt that the sister

had boosted my confidence and raised my self esteem. She had recognised my struggle even though I had not even shared my feelings with anyone. She did not have to encourage me to carry on, but she did, she had seen something in me that I could not see for myself and that gave me the incentive I needed to carry on. I did qualify as a midwife and it did help me to find work.

The sister’s intervention taught me to help and encourage others who were struggling to achieve their goal and also that it is safe to move from your comfort zone and be able to learn and become confident in something new.”

MENNA LLOYD JONES

“I recently chaired a study day and a specialist nurse for epidermolysis bullosa (EB) described her speciality to an audience of generalist nurses. EB is the name for a group of incurable genetic skin conditions, which cause the skin to blister and tear at the slightest touch. When I was a teenager, I volunteered with the Red Cross in Switzerland; we were paired up, one able-bodied person with one disabled person to give each other support, and in our group we had a young man with EB. We went on vacations together. I did this twice; one year we travelled to Italy and another to the Jura to learn Esperanto (and yes, in two weeks, one can learn this man-made language to fluency!). Listening to the EB specialist nurse, it brought back memories of that time and gave me food for thought, namely that in 15 years of being a nurse consultant in tissue viability, I have never had to offer advice or nurse a patient born with EB. One in 17,000 live births in the UK will be an infant with a form of EB. There are around 5,000 people in the UK living

with EB, but very few live in the north east of England.

The specialist nurse related the story of a little girl, called Maisy, who she had known since she was two days old. Maisy’s story can be found on the DEBRA website (<https://www.debra.org.uk/real-life-stories/maisy>). Maisy was born with EB, which has affected her entire body, including her oesophagus, her tongue and mouth, making her vulnerable to agonising blisters from contact as minor as the seams of her clothing, or turning her head on a pillow. Her body has to be regularly bandaged, but even that cannot protect her skin from everyday bumps and rubs. Her mum has to constantly lance the blisters and treat the open wounds that form as a result of normal life. She has to administer strong pain relief every six hours to enable Maisy to cope with the pain; a daily routine that can take hours.

I look after patients with wounds every day, but the challenges these parents face are indescribable; they have skills far beyond any of mine and, in my mind, they are truly inspirational.

FANIA PAGNAMENTA

