

Celebrating International Nurses Day 2020

Nursing the world to health

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International Nurses Day is celebrated around the world on the birthday of Florence Nightingale, 12 May, to commemorate the foundational philosopher of modern-day nursing. The event, established in 1974 by the International Council of Nurses (ICN), also serves to highlight the important role that nurses fulfil in healthcare. Although International Nurses Day is celebrated annually, 2020 marks the 200th anniversary of Ms Nightingale's birth, and therefore the World Health Assembly designated 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.



Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), known as “The Lady With the Lamp”, was a British nurse, social reformer and statistician best known as the founder of modern nursing. Her experiences as a nurse during the Crimean War were foundational in her views about sanitation.

Each year, the ICN commemorates International Nurses Day to raise awareness of issues or challenges in the nursing profession, including the impact of economic factors and ongoing struggles against inadequate remuneration and unsatisfactory working conditions.

Nurses account for more than half of the world's health workers, providing vital services throughout the health system. Findings identified in the State of the World's Nursing Report¹ identified the gaps in the current nursing workforce and important areas that need investment to improve health for all, outlining the roles and contributions of the nurses.

Nurses need to be healthy, wear their personal protective equipment (PPE) and work within their scope of practice. Historically, and still today, nurses have been at the forefront of fighting epidemics and pandemics across the globe. Currently, around the world they are demonstrating their compassion, bravery and courage as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic; never has their value been more clearly demonstrated. The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the urgent need to strengthen the global health workforce.

The year 2020 has been dedicated to nurses. It is time that all nurses were valued for their dedication and efforts in nursing the sick back to health. Nurses make a difference in so many lives; they leave their homes early, return late at night due to their shifts, and have minimal time for families and themselves. For Nurses' Week, SASOHN would like occupational health nurse practitioners to be honoured as follows:

- Respect – may all be respected for their admirable qualities and for their professionalism in the workplace.
- Recognition – they deserve recognition from employees, employers and other stakeholders who should understand the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the occupational health nurse. It is equally important to understand the vital role played by occupational health nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic at the workplace. Some have had to take a lead, advising and making recommendations to management.
- Realistic expectations – they should be able to practise their duties safely and within their scope of practice. They need time to rest and recover – and to be given time out to recoup.
- Remembered – they should be remembered for having a wealth of information that they share. They make an impact and a difference in so many lives; some may not appreciate what they do but most have left a legacy.
- Renew – they should be remembered for the day they took an oath to be of service to others, their great work should be appreciated, and they should be valued for the sacrifices they make on a daily basis. The year 2020 is dedicated to nurses and is meant to be filled with celebrations dedicated to the nurse and the midwife.



The SASOHN 2020 ExCo, back row, L–R: Doreen Botha, Ruwaida Johnson, Thandi Kumalo, Belinda Walters-Giraut, Lindie Janse van Rensburg, Kim Davies, and Tania Vos; middle row, L–R: Karen Mayer, Louise de Wet, Bella Sepalameo, Elize van Jaarsveld, and Louwna Pretorius; front row (SASOHN office bearers), L–R: Annemarie Mare, Catherine van Niekerk, Denise Minnie (president), Joan Visser, and Michelle Bester

Photograph: SASOHN

Nurses and midwives are the first point of care and the backbone of the health system. They devote their lives to meeting essential, everyday health service needs of communities. When one reflects on their role as occupational health nurses, we know it is a calling to render medical and occupational health services to the workers at the workplace. Occupational health nurses are required to be thinkers in times of crisis, counsellors when employees or employers face a crisis, and providers of health education and recommendations in any one of a thousand situations or dilemmas.

Added to this, they are entrusted with confidential information which has many implications for the employee, employer and the nurse practitioner. As occupational health nurses, they nurse and care for all employees, dedicating their time and always giving of their best to ensure that all employees at a workplace are healthy and safe from risks and harm.

Ordinarily, this would be a time for celebration but, as nurses across the world stand united in responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must use International Nurses Day to shine a light on the remarkable work that all healthcare staff are doing for the entire nation and the world. Most importantly, these frontline workers, as they are affectionally called, will be remembered for many years to come.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. State of the World's Nursing Report 2020: Investing in Education, Jobs and Leadership. Geneva: WHO; 2020.



Louwna Pretorius
Photograph: SASOHN

SASOHN CELEBRATIONS

SASOHN has many reasons to celebrate during the lockdown as SASOHN's honorary life member, Ms Louwna Pretorius, recently graduated with her Masters of Nursing degree from the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. Louwna Pretorius is a SASOHN past president and continues to be an active SASOHN member at both regional and national levels. Her thesis was a qualitative study exploring 'The experiences of nurse practitioners on the support of managers in an occupational health and safety programme in a manufacturing environment'. SASOHN would like to congratulate Louwna on this great achievement and wish her well in all future endeavours. We are very proud of her wonderful achievement; this could not have come at a better time as we celebrate the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.