

PROFILE

On the rewards of skill mix: Lynn Young

Lynn Young has been awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of General Practitioners. She spoke to Lucy Jolin



It is unlikely that many practice nurses today have heard of Hannah Grant. But in her own way, she was a trailblazer. 'She's the first practice nurse to be described in the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) archives,' says Lynn Young, the Royal College of Nursing's primary care adviser and a member of the *Practice Nursing* editorial board. 'We know hardly anything about her except that she was working as a practice nurse in 1912 and became the GP locum overnight when her GP employer went to France to save lives in the First World War. Maybe this is skill mix at its best?'

Lynn has just become only the second nurse to be awarded the Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of General Practitioners (FRCGP (Hon)), an honour that Hannah Grant could only have dreamed of. The first nurse to be awarded, elected in 1982, was Lisbeth Hockey, who sadly died earlier this year.

For Lynn, the Fellowship is more than a personal achievement. It is a sign of how far nursing has advanced.

'Being awarded this honour is an acknowledgment of what nursing can be and how patient care can be improved through doctors and nurses working well together. It promotes the value of teamwork and effective networking. The opportunities for better teamworking and learning from one another are huge.'

Lynn was awarded the Fellowship for making an 'outstanding contribution to

the ideals of the RCGP'. As the RCN's lead on primary care, an important part of her role is developing and influencing policy and practice.

'The RCGP's ideals focus on the provision of high-quality care for families, individuals and communities. Continuity of care is a key element,' she says. 'Perhaps I've helped to fulfil these ideals by working closely with nurses and GPs who also embrace the same values.'

'Hopefully GPs feel that the RCN works with them rather than against them. Cooperation between different disciplines is vital, because when nursing and medicine come together in a respectful, complementary way, patients get the best care. Maybe my fellowship will be another step forward to true partnership working.'

Lynn strongly believes that teamwork is vital if practice nurses are to get the recognition they deserve.

'Historically, the relationship between GPs and nurses has not always been a happy one. But it is everyone's job to make sure that the valuable work of practice nurses is recognized.'

Lynn worked in hospitals and district nursing before taking up her role at the RCN in 1990. She believes her experience has helped open out the bigger picture of what makes a good nurse.

'In a way, it's not surprising that practice nurses don't get the recognition they deserve, but things are quite rightly changing and everyone accepts that the practice nurse is now a core member of the primary care team. Excellent nursing—a combination of good interpersonal skills, compassion, expertise, experience and

knowledge—can sometimes be difficult to identify until it is missing.'

Lynn appreciates that media horror stories of nursing-gone-wrong have affected morale in many practices. She wants to see press coverage of the thousands of success stories which occur, unnoticed, in primary care every day. And she believes it is also down to patients to let their GPs and practice nurses know how they feel.

'In this country we're very good at exchanging bad news, but not so good at telling the good stories. This must be challenged. The public needs to feel confident about giving general practice feedback on the services they receive.'

Today's nursing world has gone far beyond that of Hannah Grant. But Lynn says this is just the beginning.

'In 1912 there was one practice nurse (that we know of). In 1989 there were 8000 and two years later there were 18 000. That rapid growth lined up so many challenges for primary care, and so many wonderful opportunities.'

'In the future, practice nurses will work in teams, will have to be more selective about what they do and learn to delegate more with confidence. We are moving towards a much more collective approach to providing health care and in the future there will, hopefully, be a lot more sharing of the practice workload.'

'Yes, there are huge demands being made of us, and a lot of imagination and courage will be required to build an effective workforce. But when good, talented and well-motivated people discuss how services can be improved, wonderful things can happen.'

Lynn Young is Primary Care Policy and Practice Adviser at the RCN, London