

## June Hewett



In 1947 I left school at the age of 16 years. Initially I wanted to be a nursery nurse but this would have meant leaving home to train and I did not want to do this so I opted to be a cadet nurse at St Martins Hospital in Bath and started in September 1947 on the children's ward. This was staffed by a ward sister who was state registered, nurse, a staff nurse who was a registered sick children's nurse, a state enrolled nurse, two part-time nursing assistants and the rest of the staff were 16-18 year olds. We were not given any formal teaching, we just learned what to do as we went along. The children's ward was a nightingale single story unit with about 10 cots, 10 beds and a small annex for isolating any infectious patient.

"We worked a 48 hour week, day duty was 8am- 8pm and we either did 8am-5pm or 8am to 2pm and then back at 5pm until 8pm We had one and a half days off a week. I was non-resident and my wages were £1-18-6 (old money) per week.

"Our duties were very varied. First thing in the morning we had to midwifery clean the ward floor. We pushed the beds and cots to the centre of the ward, put tea leaves down on the floor to reduce dust and then swept the floor. We then put blobs of polish on the floor which polished it with a bumper - this being a heavy block about 10 by 5 inches in width and about four inches in depth with a handle in the centre which we swung from side to side to polish the floor – it was a very good exercise for the figure!!! We also had to stoke the two or three solid fuel burners in the centre of the ward - there was no central heating in the wards in those days!

"We then cared for the children which included taking the children to theatre for surgery, staying in theatre during the operation & then bringing the unconscious child back to the ward with the help of a porter to guide the trolley.

"Parents were not allowed to visit their child whilst in hospital unless they were critically ill.

"When the National Health Service came into being in July 1948 as cadet nurses it did not really make any difference to us but it probably made a difference to the parents as they didn't have to pay for their child's care, but our jobs didn't change at all.



"I was there for two years and then when I was 18 years old I started my SEN training course (the hospital was a training school for SEN's) We had two weeks in school at the beginning of the course before going into the adult wards to work. At the end of the two weeks I was told I was not to do SEN training, I was to do SRN training and so in December 1949 I went to the Royal United Hospital in Bath. This was a three year training with a compulsory fourth year as a staff nurse. As my main interest was paediatrics, I did this on the paediatric unit. After this I did part one midwifery training, but I didn't like it and did not want to be a midwife so did not do part two. I knew I wanted to do training in children's nursing and that was a two year post registrations course so I did that at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in London and then I came back to the Royal United Hospital in Bath as the first night staff nurse in the casualty unit. Prior to my appointment, there was only a senior nurse on casualty at night and if not busy she had to go to the wards & help out! I was promoted five months later to junior sister on the paediatric ward, where I was staff nurse and I did that for about 18 months. I then applied to the Bristol Children' Hospital and was night sister for about nine months and I would have stayed but I was persuaded to do a training course to become a tutor. I didn't really want to do it but it was a good opportunity and I did that between 1963 and 1965 in Battersea. I came back to the Bristol Royal Infirmary and I did 21 years in teaching before I retired in 1986. During this time I became an examiner for the General Nursing Council. I retired in 1986 at the age of 55 years because I was so tired of all the changes that were taking place in education, particularly in paediatrics. Had I not retired I would have had to take a degree to continue teaching!!!

"I joined the NHS Retirement Fellowship in 1988 and I became Branch Secretary in 1989 - I only stepped down from that role last July in 2022.

"I think I was very lucky that my training was so good because it was very hands on and it was much harder and heavier than now because the patients had to stay in bed until they were discharged which resulted in much more basic care, e.g. bed baths, prevention of bed sores, daily dressings etc.

"I am very proud of the NHS because it has done a lot of good for a lot of people and the great advances that have been made over the years in all aspects of treatment etc. - when I think of other countries where people have to pay for their treatments it makes me realise how wonderful the NHS is. I am fortunate that there has not been very much wrong with me but it is good to know the NHS is there for me. I think it must have been very hard for those staff who were working through the Covid pandemic and they were much appreciated."

