



Norma Garthwaite



Norma Garthwaite has been responsible for the purchase of major pieces of medical and surgical equipment at hospitals in both Scotland and England.

The 71 year old joined the NHS the day after its 22nd birthday in 1970 as a clerical officer at Nether Edge Hospital in Sheffield. She explained: "When I was at school there were only a few options for girls** - you could be a teacher, a nurse or a secretary. I didn't know anyone who went to university. I left school in 1968 at 16 with O levels and then went to college to take the Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Business Studies. I saw a job for a clerical officer at Nether Edge Hospital in the local newspaper. I had no idea what to expect with joining the NHS and I didn't really think about it, it was just a job, but a great decision – how fortunate was I? I've still got my first contract of employment - it is handwritten.

"In the main office there was a male higher clerical officer, a cashier, a welfare officer who used to collect the pensions for the patients and give them spending money, and me".

Norma started to get involved with the purchasing and stores management side of the business of hospital administration. She added: "My first job every morning would be to do the filing - I still like and am good at filing now but I don't do it first thing anymore!"

In 1976 she decided the time had come to leave home so she got a job at the Oxford Regional Health Authority working on the purchase of capital equipment such as X-ray machines. She moved back to Sheffield when her mother became seriously ill and got a

job with the Trent Regional Health Authority in a similar role. She said: "Most of my colleagues were men and more senior than me. They were lovely gentlemen though, it was just the way it was then."

She had day release and in 1985 qualified as a Member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply.

Norma became involved in larger and more complex NHS purchases, a process she readily admits was bureaucratic but left her with immense job satisfaction in what she was doing to contribute to the NHS. She was amongst the first people to negotiate national contracts in the NHS and was at the forefront as new ideas such as manual handling and bariatric equipment were brought in for staff and patient benefit. She was involved in the seismic change from manual systems to e-procurement systems and began to develop her career and take on more managerial roles as she gained experience and knowledge. She reflected: "I used to purchase Hoskins** beds and that sticks with me whenever I'm in a hospital and see them, or on a medical drama on the television, I get taken straight back to purchasing them."

In 1995 she made what she describes as "the best decision I ever made" and moved to Scotland for a fresh start. She immediately noticed that contract law was different but adapted quickly and she feels that the NHS works better in Scotland because it is less complicated and joined up with social care. She said: "I worked for a division of National Services Scotland and used to have to travel around the country. I'd always try and take a day's annual leave after a meeting somewhere so I got to explore a lot of Scotland that way which I absolutely loved." The department was self-financing and had to generate income by bidding for contracts to equip new hospitals. She remains proud of her purchase of a Tandem Mass Spectrometer for the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton - which she believes was the first one of its kind in the NHS.

Norma retired in 2011 and joined the Edinburgh & Lothians branch of the NHS Retirement Fellowship shortly afterwards. She continues to use her skills and experience for the benefit of the NHS as a volunteer admin assistant at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. She said: "I enjoy the buzz of a major hospital, keeping up-to-date with computer skills and meeting new people."