MEN IN NURSING:
Real men share their insights

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Deena Naidoo

True to its commitment of advancing the male role in nursing, The Forum for Professional Nurse Leaders made two ad-hoc male appointments to its executive committee. This was done so as to give our male nursing counterparts a voice in matters relating to nurse leadership and empowerment. The appointments were offered to Deena Naidoo, Quality Systems Specialist at Life Healthcare, and AB van der Watt, Nursing Manager, Netcare Femina Hospital.

Both Deena and AB were willing to participate in interviews to share their personal experiences of being a male in the South African nursing profession. Their collective insights make for a compelling read and probe into what really makes the male nurse tick.

Full names:
Deena Naidoo

Position held:
Quality Systems Specialist, Life Healthcare

Star sign:
Leo

Hobbies/interests:
Golf, international sport, international political affairs

1. What inspired you to become a nurse?
The passion for dealing with and caring for human life inspired me to become positioned at the frontline of South African health care delivery.

2. What, in your opinion, are some of the stigmas attached to being a male in nursing?
• Historically, male nurses have been perceived as homosexual. This, in most instances, is not the case and a damaging generalisation.
• Nursing is a female-dominated profession, therefore, again, practising male nurses are often perceived as “feminine”.
• Some cultures do not recognise the role of the male in nursing or that of a male nurse attending to female patients. As a result, male nurse colleagues have been subjected to much ridicule in their respective communities.

3. What are the highlights of being a male in nursing?
The greatest reward in nursing has to be the opportunity to provide a service to humanity through healing and touch… to know that you are making a difference to humanity as a whole.

4. Who has been your personal mentor or role model and why?
Mother Theresa – I have always followed her life path since I was a child and often make reference to it in public and corporate presentations. She is the embodiment of selfless dedication and commitment to the service of humanity.

5. How has your career evolved in terms of being employed as a clinical nurse (in practice) to your current position?
I initially trained as a staff nurse and furthered my studies to become a professional nurse and midwife. Later, I completed an intensive care unit (ICU) specialisation which led to my promotion as Manager of an ICU unit. Later, Life Healthcare offered me an opportunity to manage three different ICU units at one of their hospitals. In 2006, I was again promoted to Quality Systems Specialist for the group and also spent six months as the acting National Operations Manager for the Quality Department.

6. From your experience, what have been the most important characteristics that have contributed to your success?
• Leadership – taking the lead in a critical care environment to ensure the most favourable patient outcomes, through
effective human resource interaction and planning. (I managed a team of 100 health care professionals during my management position at Life Glynwood Hospital)

- Responsibility/accountability – demonstrating reliability in the execution of all necessary tasks.

7. What has been the single most significant event in your career as a nurse and why?
Passing all my nursing courses cum laude and receiving an international award in Saudi Arabia for my work in an independent company employing nurses from all over the world to serve in the military hospitals.

8. What advice would you give to young male students considering nursing as a profession?

- Nursing is not a “job”, it is a profession that involves a lot of sacrifice + clinical competency and the requisite skills application.
- I would encourage young males to stay positive and focused in reaching for their dreams, regardless of male stereotyping.

9. What are the advantages of being a nurse in South Africa?
- Excellent exposure to a range of clinical specialities due to South Africa’s diverse culture and political climate. This presents an ideal opportunity for career development.
- The scope of practice is broad with SA’s nurses being empowered to effectively make a difference to health care provision.

10. Any final comments?
As health care professionals, I think we have an excellent opportunity (within both the public and private sectors) to improve clinical and quality outcomes in the South African health care industry. I believe that public-private partnership will herald a new era in the delivery of effective quality health care for all.

Full names:
Abel D van der Watt

Position held:
Nursing Services Manager, Netcare Femina Hospital

Age:
39

Star sign:
Cancer

Hobbies/interests:
Biking, playing squash

1. What inspired you to become a nurse?
After studying clinical tech. for a year I decided that it was not for me and went to do my national military service. Eventually I worked in the ICU in 1 Military Hospital as a medic and knew that that was what I wanted to do. I became part of the permanent force and studied nursing through the military nursing college.

2. What, in your opinion, are some of the stigmas attached to being a male in nursing?
I have never encountered any person that treated me differently because I am a nurse; even when I did midwifery I had no problems. I think it is all about how you carry and respect yourself.

3. What are the highlights of being a male in nursing?
I don’t think that being a male makes it different or that male nurses get treated differently. One advantage during training was that patients, especially confused and older patients, would think that I was a doctor and would react differently towards me than towards the female nursing students.

4. Is sufficient media attention given to the male role in nursing? We often see how the heroic paramedic is portrayed by men, but are male nurses given the same acclaim?
I don’t think that the nursing profession as a whole gets enough coverage in the media or elsewhere. Most of the time nursing only appears in the media when something went wrong. Being a male nurse is no different from being female; I just don’t think schools and educators are that aware of the opportunity for men to study nursing.

5. Who has been your personal mentor or role model and why?
I have had so many people who taught me over the years. I tend to look out for the good things that I can learn from every person I come into contact with. I have been fortunate to work with so many knowledgeable and passionate people. If I have to name one person it would be Kathy Smith (Nursing Manager at Netcare Olivedale Hospital). She taught me so much about managing people and even today I still call her “Boss”.

6. In a short summary, tell us about the important role a Nurse Manager plays in the hospital setting?
When I got my first Unit Manager position I asked the Matron, “Where can I find a book to teach me how to be a Unit Manager?” Her response was that it starts with integrity and passion.

Leading people to do the right thing and always making sure patients get safe nursing care is of utmost importance to me. Almost daily, I am faced with situations that I have not encountered before. Sometimes you have to make decisions on only a few facts or on your gut feeling.

7. What has been the single most significant event in your career as a nurse and why?
As an ICU nurse I had the opportunity to help save a few patients lives that would have died without immediate assistance. One Sunday morning a man collapsed after church, he had no pulse and stopped breathing. We resuscitated him successfully and he was transferred to Unitas Hospital. I knew he was going to be admitted to my short-staffed unit so I went straight to my unit where I personally admitted him and nursed him on the ventilator for the rest of the day. He went to the ward after a few days where he collapsed again. I was called to the ward where I resuscitated him successfully for a second time.

8. What advice would you give to young male students considering nursing as a profession?
Don’t be afraid to admit you are a caring person, just do it!