Where the heart is

RCNi Nurse Awards winner Geraldine Rodgers, a nurse consultant for frailty and long-term conditions at North East London NHS Foundation Trust, explains why her heart lies in the specialty

By Layla Haidrani
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Geraldine Rodgers was winner of the Nursing Older People category at the RCNi Nurse Awards 2016

What does your job involve?
The nurse consultant role enables nurses to use their expert clinical skills in a more senior capacity but without taking on the traditional managerial role. No day is ever quite the same.

I work in a community of practice for frailty and long-term conditions. We are known to be proactive and creative in our approach.

What might you have done otherwise?
I love nursing and it was always going to happen. I left Ireland in my late teens to make my dream a reality. However, I have discovered a passion for interior decorating along the way so something in this area might have been an option. Creating dementia-friendly environments has tapped into this skill and it has been great working on those projects.

Where have you worked before?
I trained at the Croydon and Carshalton School of Nursing and qualified in 1993. I knew early on in my training that looking after older people was where my heart lay.

I was always keen to see nursing older people recognised as a specialist skill. My roles have always centred on older people and include being the youngest ward sister for medicine and older people.

I was also the first Parkinson’s nurse specialist in Croydon and then I became a community matron, working on the first virtual ward in the country, which won national acclaim. I am lucky that my career has spanned acute and community settings.

What do you enjoy most about your work?
The diversity of the nurse consultant role, and exploring new ways of working to improve care for older people.

What is the greatest challenge at work?
Recruiting staff to work with older people is one of the greatest challenges at this time.

What would you change if you could?
I would like a national positive focus on older people along with a campaign for healthy ageing. This approach would encourage good health, allowing older people to undertake a more active role in their communities, maintain their independence and quality of life.

Outside work, what do you enjoy?
Spending time with family and friends. I try to keep fit with Zumba and Pilates classes, and also like exploring new places – especially nice restaurants with my husband.

What nursing achievement are you proudest of?
I have been fortunate in my chosen career path setting up new services for older people and becoming a Fellow in Older People this year.

My fellowship project was recognised for several national awards, which has been remarkable and humbling. However, one of my proudest moments was helping a patient approaching her 100th birthday to achieve her goal of knitting a blanket for the Dingle family sofa on the set of Emmerdale – it will be a day I remember for a long time.

What advice would you give to a newly qualified nurse in your field?
Nursing older people is rewarding. You will need to be skilled as our patients have many, often complex, conditions that require expertise and attention. You will learn so much from your patients, and their outlook on life will ensure you appreciate yours.

You are as young as you feel and remember, age is only a number.

The closing date for entries to the RCNi Nurse Awards 2017 is 6 January. To enter go to www.nurseawards.co.uk