CONGRESS CELEBRATES DISTINGUISHED NURSE LEADER AND CROSS-BENCH PEER

Tributes have been paid to the late Baroness Jean McFarlane, a founding fellow of the RCN and pioneering nurse academic. Sarah Harrison reports

Hundreds of nurses at RCN congress joined in a one-minute standing ovation last week to honour the life of eminent nurse Baroness McFarlane, who had died the previous weekend aged 86.

Born in Cardiff, Jean McFarlane was a founding fellow of the college in 1976 and the first chair of congress. She led an influential career that included being given a seat in the House of Lords.

RCN council chair Kath McCourt told the congress hall in Harrogate, North Yorkshire: ‘Baroness McFarlane was a professor of nursing at University of Manchester and an esteemed nurse, midwife and teacher. The RCN has sent its sincere condolences to Jean’s family.’

RCN general secretary Peter Carter told Nursing Standard: ‘Baroness McFarlane was an iconic figure and a tremendous role model to many. The contribution she made to nursing will be felt for generations to come.’

Baroness McFarlane led the RCN’s research programme that looked at the study of nursing care in the 1960s. In 2004 the RCN made her best-known work, the 66-page Proper Study of the Nurse, available on its website.

In 1973 she became England’s first professor of nursing, a position she held at University of Manchester. Later that decade she was involved in the influential Royal Commission on the NHS, spanning three years.

Her input led to an invite to the House of Lords and in 1979 she became Baroness McFarlane of Llandaff, sitting as a cross-bencher.

In the Lords she was a member of four select committees and outside parliament became vice president of the League of Nurses of St Bartholomew’s Hospital.

She retired from teaching in 1989. In June 2009, the University of Manchester honoured Baroness McFarlane by naming its school of nursing, midwifery and social work the Jean McFarlane building.

University of Manchester professor of nursing history Christine Hallett said: ‘Not only was Baroness McFarlane one of the main architects of the first nursing degree in the UK and England’s first professor of nursing, she was also a much loved and inspirational teacher.’

Baroness McFarlane’s death leaves the House of Lords with only three nursing representatives. Nursing Standard launched its Peer Pressure campaign to increase the number of nurses in the upper chamber last year NS.

For more details on the Peer Pressure campaign go to http://tinyurl.com/peer-pressure-campaign

Outstanding nurses awarded fellowships by college

Eight nurse leaders became RCN fellows at congress last week during a ceremony to recognise their outstanding contribution to nursing.

› Uduak Archibong, the UK’s first professor of diversity, for her contribution to equality in nursing.

› Philip Burnard, a former professor at the University of Cardiff, for developing communication and interpersonal skills in nursing.

› Linda Harper, associate director for practice nursing at Grampian Health Board, for tirelessly promoting nursing to GPs.

› Mary Harrison, tissue viability nurse at the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital Trust, for contributions to wound care.

› Wilfred McSherry, a professor at Staffordshire University and Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, for his work promoting spirituality and dignity.

› Trish Morris-Thompson, chief nurse at NHS London strategic health authority, for her leadership skills.

› Jane Salvage, nurse and journalist, for being a champion for social justice.

› Eileen Sills, chief nurse at Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust, London, for inspiring colleagues to improve standards.