Treat people as individuals and always care with a smile

Double award-winning nurse and falls coordinator Sharon Love explains why she is so passionate about her work

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What is your job?
I am the falls coordinator for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in Antrim, Northern Ireland. I manage a service that follows up and screens older people who have fallen in the community. These patients have been attended to by ambulance crews, but have not been automatically transferred to an emergency department. I also review falls incidents and complete investigations on those resulting in moderate to severe injury. Educating staff about falls prevention and management is also a core aspect of this service.

What might you have done if you had not become a nurse?
Growing up, I always had two careers in mind: teaching and nursing. As a result of caring for a close family member I decided to complete nurse training. I now get the best of both worlds because education is an essential component of my job.

Where did you train?
I completed my training in the Belfast City Hospital Trust. A state-of-the-art, multi-storey tower building had just opened, creating a lot of excitement. When I drive past this building today, it still brings back fond memories.

Why did you specialise in the care of older people?
During nurse training I had many enjoyable placements with older patients in acute settings. Later, when I saw the falls coordinator post being advertised, I recalled older patients who had fallen, and how the associated injuries had had devastating consequences for their function and quality of life. I decided to apply for the post. I believed that the post could make a difference to our older population and help to reduce their risk of falling.

What nursing achievement makes you most proud?
First, the development of a falls prevention therapeutic exercise and education programme, which won a best patient/client safety initiative award at the Northern Health and Social Care Trust’s Sharing Excellence Leading Quality awards. Second, and more recently, winning the leadership award at the RCN Northern Ireland Nurse of the Year 2017 awards. This is undoubtedly a highlight because it acknowledged how I led the development of falls prevention and management in the trust.

What are the challenges in your specialty?
In the busy world of nursing, falls are not always given enough attention, with many staff saying they cannot prevent them. Thankfully, this situation is changing as more statistics become available about the consequences of falls on quality of life and longevity. Raising the profile of falls through staff education, and appropriate assessment and intervention tools, is an essential part of holistic care for older people.

What are the qualities of a good older people’s nurse?
Great communication and interpersonal skills, which also includes listening skills. They must be respectful at all times and have a caring attitude towards older people. Another quality is emotional stability, as caring for older people can be distressing, but these are often balanced by many heart-warming moments.

Outside work, what do you enjoy?
Like most people, I enjoy shopping, eating out and reading a good book. I also enjoy singing and I am a member of a local choir.

What advice would you give to a newly qualified older people’s nurse?
Be passionate and enthusiastic about your work – your patients will appreciate this and know you really care. Show patience, kindness and empathy at all times. Don’t be afraid to speak out, be an advocate for older patients, who may not have a voice. Learn from patients’ experiences, reflect on your practice and always strive to be a better nurse. Treat each older person as an individual and always deliver compassionate care with a smile.