



Introduction

by Alison Tierney, Roger Watson, David Benton, Daniel Kelly, Michael Brown and Kath McCourt

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) confers its highest award – a Fellowship – in recognition of exceptional commitment to advancing the science and practice of nursing and the improvement of health and patient care. The scheme was introduced in 1976 in the RCN's 60th year.

RCN Fellows can be practitioners, researchers, educationalists and leaders and they represent all sectors and levels of the profession, and all four countries of the UK.

Honorary Fellowships are also awarded. These are for nurses who are registered outside the UK or people who are not nurses, but who also have made a significant impact on nursing or health care. The full Fellowship is for members of the RCN who are registered nurses in the UK. A small number of Fellowships are awarded each year by a process of nomination and election. Including the awards announced in 2020, there are now 206 Fellows and 46 Honorary Fellows on the Roll of Honour.

Individually, RCN Fellows make ongoing contributions of various kinds to support the professional agenda of the College. The Fellows Coordinating Committee, currently chaired by Kath McCourt (FRCN 2008), is

the decision-making body for the group and it organises activities for the Fellows, including an annual meeting at RCN HQ in London.

However, for the wider College membership and the profession at large, the collective contribution of RCN Fellows to the advancement of nursing science and practice is not well known. So, as a way of celebrating the designation by the World Health Organization (WHO) of 2020 as The International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, the Fellows Group has produced this collection of articles to illustrate some of their work. The articles highlight some of the many changes and achievements in nursing over the past 50 years.

Exemplary research and scholarship

The impetus for this project came from Jane Ball (FRCN 2019) at the annual meeting in November 2019 when the Fellows Group discussed what it might do to mark the year 2020. Jane suggested we should publicise the exemplary research and scholarship that can lead to the award of a Fellowship by reprinting a series of 20 notable papers that have been published by 20 Fellows over the years. However, the logistics of re-publishing papers can be tricky, and also would generate a large

volume of reading. So, instead, we decided to produce a collection of new, not-too-long, essay-style articles in which Fellows would offer a personal reflection on the influence and impact of one of their past publications, also offering their view of its impact and influence over time and its relevance to current and future challenges for nursing.

Contributors were asked to write in a personal and reflective style in the hope that this will engage readers and encourage their own assessment of the impact and ongoing relevance of Fellows' work.

Of course, not all of the activities of RCN Fellows end up in the form of published work and so this collection of articles does not represent the whole gamut and variety of their contributions to nursing practice, education, research and policy – and beyond. However, a wide range of topics are addressed across the 22 articles in the collection. A few of them are co-authored, so we have not ended up with the neat 20-20 equation that originally was envisaged, but near enough. There was no selection process and no formal peer review.

The idea was explained to Fellows in a circular email towards the end of last year and expressions of interest in contributing an article were invited. There was an enthusiastic response. The contributors were free to choose their underpinning publication – as long as it can be accessed online – and while most of the articles are based on a research or scholarly journal paper, a few are based on a book or a book chapter or a policy report.

Sense of pride

Each contributor was paired with one member of the team of Fellows that steered this project and they provided feedback on drafts and helped keep the work on track. The team comprised Alison Tierney (FRCN 1995), Roger Watson (FRCN 2009), David Benton (2003), Daniel Kelly (2016) and Michael Brown (2015). Kath McCourt (2008), as convenor of Fellows, chaired the team's meetings and kept the College up to date with progress as well as securing the assistance of Nursing Standard as publisher.

Much of the work was progressed during the months of the COVID-19 lockdown across the UK. Most of it anyway would have been done by email and we held our team meetings on Zoom. For some of us this project provided a welcome preoccupation during those 'stay at home' months of the lockdown but, for others, it made added demands to

professional or personal responsibilities that were heightened by the pandemic.

For all of us involved in any way with nursing, 2020 will be remembered with great sadness for all the lives lost, but also with an abiding sense of pride in how nurses stepped up to manage the crisis with such professionalism, compassion and courage.

In spite of preoccupation with the pandemic, the designation of 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife still calls for us to celebrate the wider value and achievements of nursing, and also to focus our minds on the challenges ahead.

New generation

These challenges have been highlighted through the global Nursing Now campaign and are set out in detail in the State of the World's Nursing report published in April by WHO. It is clear that the nursing profession has a crucial and central role to play if the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for global health are to be attained and if that so-far elusive concept of 'health for all' is to become a reality.

But progress is not inevitable; we need to create it ourselves. One of our hopes for this collection of articles is that these personal stories of work done by RCN Fellows will inspire newer members of the profession to see how ideas and ambitions to improve nursing can be taken forward and realised for it falls to each new generation to ensure the ongoing advancement of the science and practice of nursing for the coming years and decades.

We did think about collecting the articles together under themes but, in the end, we have decided to present them simply in a chronological sequence according to year of Fellowship award. Almost the entire span of the 40 years of the award scheme is represented.

The 22 articles are prefaced by a stand-alone paper, also being published in the regular issue of Nursing Standard, that reports the findings of a bibliometric analysis of the published work of the Fellows as a collective. This piece of work was initiated and led by David Benton, also involving other members of the team. We think this work clearly demonstrates that RCN Fellows are unequivocally making a contribution – an enduring legacy – that reflects the original intent of the award in advancing the art and science of nursing and the improvement of health care.