Three years ago I was given a 15% chance of survival after contracting sepsis in hospital,’ says nursing student Katie Dutton. ‘My PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line was left in for too long, my arm was infected and the signs were not spotted quickly enough.

‘But I was one of the lucky ones who survived. I knew I needed to make a difference, and I was determined to be a voice for all of those who didn’t make it. About 44,000 people die from sepsis every year in the UK – that’s a football stadium of people and more than breast, bowel and prostate cancer deaths combined.

Inspired by personal experience
‘I had been given a chance when those people had not. I was inspired to become a nurse, so during my very long recovery, I did an access to nursing course by distance learning from my hospital bed.’

Ms Dutton’s ongoing campaign to improve sepsis recognition among the next generation of nurses has seen her crown the RCNi Nurse Awards Andrew Parker Student Nurse of the Year.

‘It was the first student-led project in sepsis – in fact the first student-led project in healthcare for the university,’ says Ms Dutton proudly. ‘It was a monumental success. I was expecting to deliver training to spot the signs of sepsis to about 30 students but more than 200 applied. I managed to secure a venue for just over 100 students.’

She adds: ‘Students are the fresh faces of the NHS, free from organisational culture and bad habits. We are often the first to observe a deteriorating patient through routine observations and I wanted students to be aware of sepsis screening tools.

‘I can’t tell you the number of times I have heard the words “give the patient paracetamol and see how it goes”. I wanted to empower students to advocate for their patients.’

Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery senior lecturer Penny Harrison, who is Ms Dutton’s personal tutor, says: ‘Katie is fantastic. She has just completed her first year and all three placements were clear throughout the three years,’ she says. ‘We are going out on placements but don’t have the knowledge we need to keep our patients safe. And students do not always know what to do in practice to prevent sepsis.

Having started her degree in adult nursing at De Montfort University in Leicester in March 2017, Ms Dutton had delivered her first ‘Sepsis Champions’ event by January 2018.

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Katie Dutton

By Elaine Cole @prideinnursing
Training ‘champions’: SOS boxes and the Sepsis Six

Ms Dutton devised a full programme for her Sepsis Champions day, with talks from a sepsis nurse specialist and a lead lecturer in pathophysiology of shock.

Ms Dutton says: ‘Clair Tinsley, part of the UK’s first nursing team dedicated to sepsis in A&E, spoke to the students about how to screen for sepsis, which is not part of our curriculum, and the Sepsis Six – an initiative highlighting three diagnostic and three therapeutic steps to be delivered within one hour of diagnosis. She explained the sepsis packs (SOS boxes) in the resuscitation trolleys that are used to deliver the Sepsis Six quickly in practice.’

The RCN East Midlands branch spoke about the resources available, while the UK Sepsis Trust produced packs that were issued to the students.

‘Award adds credibility’
Ms Dutton is delighted to have won such a prestigious award. ‘This amazing accolade will bring such credibility to my Sepsis Champion project,’ she says.

‘Before I entered, I found out about Andrew Parker, who the award is named after. He was an RCN activist who encouraged students and young members and had the drive to express what he believed was best for patient care. I feel the work I have done, and will continue to do, honours that memory.

I am so passionate about patient care and a great believer in evidence-based practice.’

In the future, Ms Dutton hopes to specialise in sepsis nursing. But most importantly for her, the training is already making a difference. ‘Last month, a student who had been on my training told me that they had helped save someone’s life on placement. It was the best thing I could have heard. My day has helped patients – and is saving lives.’

Ms Dutton took an access to nursing course while recovering from sepsis in hospital

Ms Dutton devised an access programme for her Sepsis Champions day, with talks from a sepsis nurse specialist and a lead lecturer in pathophysiology of shock.

Ms Dutton suggests: ‘Clair Tinsley, part of the UK’s first nursing team dedicated to sepsis in A&E, spoke to the students about how to screen for sepsis, which is not part of our curriculum, and the Sepsis Six – an initiative highlighting three diagnostic and three therapeutic steps to be delivered within one hour of diagnosis. She explained the sepsis packs (SOS boxes) in the resuscitation trolleys that are used to deliver the Sepsis Six quickly in practice.’

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Read about the nurses who inspired Katie Dutton
reni.com/inspired-student

National focus
Asked about the challenges, Ms Dutton says nothing compares to the personal and physical challenges she has faced is jaw dropping. Her empathy for patients and appreciation of how they feel is unusual in someone so young. I can’t speak highly enough of her.

Ms Dutton took an access to nursing course while recovering from sepsis in hospital

Want her back when she qualifies. Her clinical mentors report that her patient care is exemplary. They have commented on her leadership potential.

‘Her determination to crack on with her nursing despite the personal and physical challenges she has faced is jaw dropping. Her empathy for patients and appreciation of how they feel is unusual in someone so young. I can’t speak highly enough of her.’

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