Celebrating Malaysian Nurses in the UK and their contributions to the NHS, 1950s – now

Malaysian Angels of the NHS



Foreword by Sir Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham

The constitution of the National Health Service opens by affirming: "the NHS belongs to the people". It belongs to all the people of the United Kingdom, and few more so than those who come from across the world to serve in it.

I warmly welcome the launch of the "Malaysian Angels of the NHS" project. It celebrates the outstanding contribution of the Malaysian nurses who came to the UK from the 1950s onwards, while also reflecting on the challenges they faced. It gives us a chance to say "thank you" to all of them for helping to care for all of us.

I have strong personal reasons for endorsing this celebration. I came to live in London when I left university in 1978. The congregation of the church I joined included a number of Malaysian nurses. Some became lifelong friends to me and my wife, who is herself from Singapore. On visiting my wife's family, I have been able to make a number of visits to Malaysia, and to some of the beautiful cities the nurses came from: Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Johor Bahru, Ipoh and Taiping.

In 2020, we were reminded again of the contribution of the Malaysian nurses to the NHS. Many came out of retirement to serve again. It was their decision, alongside thousands of other medical staff, that sustained our health service through its greatest challenge.

Malaysian nurses largely came to the UK between the 1950s and the late 1980s, when there was a mass recruitment drive to find workers for the NHS. Their contribution was not limited to their employment. They enriched the communities they settled in, and have made Britain a better place.

In the 1970s, the Malaysian Nurses Society was already active in Newham. Though it faded out in the late 80s, other groups – like the Malaysian Chinese Lunch Club – have continued.

I hope this project helps towards a much-needed permanent acknowledgment of the contribution of Malaysian nurses in our society. I am grateful to the Newham Chinese Association for leading on the project, The National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding it, and Eastside Community Heritage Centre for its work in supporting it.

Sir Stephen Timms

MP for East Ham who served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury from 2006 to 2007



Foreword by Ms. Mei Sim Lai OBE DL

I am delighted to send my congratulations and good wishes for a very successful Launch and Exhibition of the Malaysian Angels of the NHS project. What a unique and great initiative to showcase the contribution of Malaysian nurses who have worked in the NHS since the 1950s!

I commend all involved with the project and thank The National Lottery Heritage Fund for supporting this very worthwhile and interesting project.

The British Malaysian Society which I chair is celebrating 40 years of positive relations between the UK and Malaysia this year. The training and education of Malaysians in many fields in the UK is one important pillar of the relationship. This includes the many Malaysian nurses who have come to train and work in the NHS and stayed on and other trained nurses who have returned to Malaysia to contribute to healthcare services there.

As one of the Deputy Lieutenants of Greater London since 2006 and His Majesty King Charles III's Representative Lieutenant for London Borough of Brent since 2007, the building of bridges across communities to forge stronger links and promote better understanding of different cultures is very high on our agenda. For far too long the members of the South East Asian communities, Malaysians in particular, have been 'under the radar ' with not many people knowing just how different members of these communities have contributed in a positive way to British Society.

I hope the Exhibition of the Malaysian Angels for the NHS will enlighten all about the life stories of the Malaysian nurses who took part in the project and how they contributed to the NHS.

Mei Sim Lai OBE DL Chair, The British Malaysian Society Representative Deputy Lieutenant, London Borough of Brent Co-Chair, Chinese Welfare Trust Chair, Television for the Environment



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This Project is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future. <u>www.heritagefund.org.uk</u>

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Since The National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised over £43 billion for project and more than 635,000 grants have been awarded across the UK. More than £30 million raised each week goes to good causes across the UK.











HN Ho with colleagues in Celebration at Forest Gate Maternity Hospital, 1980.

10.00

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The National Health Service (NHS) is one of the largest single employers in the UK and has a diverse workforce since its creation in 1948. Many nurses were recruited from Malaysia to fill staff shortages in the NHS hospital since the 1950's. Our stories need to be told, as many are now frail and ageing. If the project does not happen, we risk losing records of their invaluable knowledge and experience.

We are truly grateful that the Newham Chinese Association (NCA), has received a grant of £67,150 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in mid-September 2023, enabling us to launch this pioneering year-long "Malaysian Angels of the NHS" Heritage Project. Read more: www.heritagefund.org.uk/projects/Malaysian-angels-nhs

Working in partnership with Eastside Community Heritage (ECH), Malaysians Chinese Lunch Club (MCLC) and True Heart Theatre (THT), the project recorded 21 oral histories from Malaysian nurses, documenting their invaluable contributions to the NHS. From the reminiscence sessions and MCLC, we have reached over 200 Malaysian nurses and their children and families in the UK and abroad. These stories are part of this groundbreaking project, which addresses an important segment of UK social history that has never been formally documented.

The four organisations co-designed and produced a bilingual Exhibition and Booklet for display at Newham University Hospital, Bryant Street Methodist and St Mark's Community Centres, Canning Town and Stratford Libraries.

The project also features a theatre piece, produce and performed by THT, using Playback Theatre methodology; also a video, and a website to archive all the materials collected for the benefits of future generations. It also trains volunteers in various heritage skills to support project delivery.

This project seeks to bring pride and recognition to the oftenoverlooked Malaysian nurses and to celebrate their enormous achievements despite many challenges.

Thank you to all National Lottery players for making this project possible.

Gill Tan, Amy Fisher & Stella Townson Project Co-ordinators, NCA & MCLC Malaysian Angels of the NHS Heritage Project Judith Garfield, Director, ECH Andy Yau, Valentina Wong & Sze Kan Cheung, Directors, THT



The Heritage Project Coordinators, May 2024.

Spring 2024

DEDICATION

According to information from the Malaysian Nurses Society set up in the 70's, to provide support for the nurses, in the late 50's, 60's & 70's and early 80's, at least 1,000 Malaysian nurses per year were recruited to serve in UK's general, psychiatric and learning disabilities hospitals, with an estimated number of at least 25,000 Malaysian nurses serving the NHS spreading all over the UK over these three decades.

The June 2022 statistic from NHS showed that there are 2,797 Malaysian nurses currently working in England. The actual figure would be much higher for the whole of the UK. The reduction in numbers is mainly due to changes in NHS (with Project 2000 and Agenda for Change) and the ageing of the Malaysian nurses, many have retired, due to occupational illnesses/injuries, e.g. bad backs, arthritis, (due to heavy lifting, long hours standing in the operating theatre), and/or, some on health grounds, e.g. cancer, dementia, visual/hearing impairment.

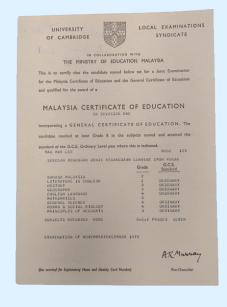
We dedicate this project to all Malaysian nurses who have served in the NHS, including all those who have passed away, are currently living in nursing/care homes, those who are frail, or living with various ailments, and those who have migrated back to Malaysia or other countries. In particular, those who have come out of their retirement to relieve staff shortages in the NHS and those who contributed enormously during the extremely challenging COVID-19 Pandemic period. These have long-lasting negative impacts on their mental and physical wellbeing!

In addition, we acknowledge all the retired nurses for their ongoing dedication and contribution to the NHS in their specialist fields/disciplines for teaching the younger generations of nurses and junior doctors, sharing and passing on their skills and knowledge.



Photos contributed by project participants and families.

Leaving Malaysia





Above: Group of Students Leaving for London, 1969. Left: ML Yau's GCE O-Level Certificate, 1975.

The Push and Pull Factors

Most of our interviewees said they had a happy childhood; they came from very diverse social backgrounds, most with big families, some with 10 siblings, some of their parents worked with the British Forces. To get into nursing, one had to attain a minimum of five O levels' education (compulsory subjects: English Language, Mathematics and Science). They were educated either in Chinese, Tamil or English medium schools. English schools are state funded, though many had been set up by the missionaries from the colonial era, while the Chinese and Tamil schools are not state funded.

With the establishment of UK NHS, there was an acute staff shortage. This led to recruitment drive in the ex-colonies including Malaysia (the Pull factor). Social-economic and political challenges in Malaysia prompted many young Malaysians to seek new opportunities abroad (the Push factor). The NHS's offer was attractive, it provided lodgings and a salary. To cover the cost of travelling expenses, the Lee Foundation Charity came to the rescue.



I'm a Lottery Girl.

"One day, when I went home, I told my parents I got an offer to do nurse training in UK! And then I asked my parents, 'Do you have any money, Mum and Dad? Can you lend me some to buy air ticket, just to go?' They hardly had any money. But... Malaysia had this lottery game. My father asked me to pick a lottery number. 'Play this number,' I said. 'It will help me to go to Britain.' My father believed in me, bought this number. And HE WON! So I'm a lottery girl!" – *CK Tham*

My Ticket of Freedom:

"It was 1969. I was an A-level sixth form student. Our teacher used to say if anyone say 'Run!'; you just run (for your life). You don't question; you just run. I lived in Chinatown in KL, Kuala Lumpur, through the hole behind the door; I could see people passed by with their knives. The Chinese would call out, 'Run away! They're coming!' and you knew obviously there was a civil unrest.

A lot of my friends at that time, came to UK to study. I was always dependant on relatives. I didn't want that because that means I would be owing them more and more. I wanted my independence, so I applied for nursing, not because I wanted to become a nurse. Nursing was my ticket of freedom."



Helen's British Council Student Membership Card, 1970s.

– H Tanner



Student Nurses in London, 1970s.

Don't come back...

"A few of my friends were already there. And they kept sending me postcards, saying the places in Europe they had visited, blah, blah, blah. This spurred me onto apply for nursing, an opportunity to see the world. It was the first time I went on a plane. Yeah, it's really exciting. And since then, I've been travelling a lot. My mom was really open minded. You see, there were nine of us so one not at home was okay. And she told me, "Don't come back for the first five years, go and travel around the world, and after that, you can come back'. I didn't go back till five years later."

– HL Ooi

Do you know how old we were when we left for the UK?



Farewell in Malaysian Airport, 1973.



Alice in UK, 1972



Gill farewell with family in KL airport, 1976.

We were 18 – 22.

LEE FOUNDATION



Dr Lee Kong Chian, Founder of Lee Foundation.

"My school principal applied on my behalf for the 600 Ringgits grant from Lee Foundation. That 600 Ringgits really helped me to pay for my airfare which was 625 Ringgits BOAC one way flight to London."

- **P Ng**

The Lee Foundation was established in 1952 by the philanthropist and businessman Lee Kong Chian. It is Singapore's* largest private charitable foundation. The numerous causes it supports include education, healthcare and disaster relief.

Many nurses benefitted from the support of Lee Foundation to make their first journey from Malaysia to the UK to study nursing.

*History Note: In 1957, Malaya obtained independence from British rule; it was renamed Malaysia in 1963. Singapore was part of Malaysia (Malaya) until their independence in 1965.

These are where we came from. Can you find us on the map of Malaysia?



Some of our participants came from these areas: Ipoh, Johor Bahru, Kelantan, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Muar, Penang, Perak, Singapore*, Sungai Patani and Taiping.

Arriving in UK

AMINIGRATION ACT 1971	INT - WORK PERMIT	
	Date of Issue 14 JUNE 1974	Peried covered by permit months from date of landing in UK
PARTICULA	RS OF PERMIT HOLDER	PARTICULARS OF EMPLOYMENT
Sumame		Enatoret's name and address
LAW		THANES GROUP HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEER
Other names		Town Road
Date of birth	FEMALE	POR ENPLOYMENT AT:- POFLAR HOSPITAL EAST INDIA DOCK ROAD
Passport number		LONDON E14
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		Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State Sutheline Breat

FN Law, Work Permit, 1974.

Travelling 6,575 miles from Malaysia, these young people took their first-ever flight, their hearts filled with dreams; carried suitcases filled with clothes and food. Under the British rule, English language became Malaysia's official language until long after independence, whence the National Language – Bahasa Malaysia was restored. Malaysians learnt English language, listened to English songs and watched English movies. How then did these young people adapt to the life, culture and climate in UK?



My name wasn't there...

"When I first landed, oh, my God, it was during September month, it was so dark. England is completely different from Malaysia. Oh, the trouble at the airport! We were supposed to be met at a certain place. There were so many nurses for different hospitals, and different areas of the country. I was the only one for Poplar, East London and nobody was there to meet me. There was only one representative there for all these people. He was ticking the names of the nurses. I was the one who was left out. Oh! My goodness, did I come the right day, the right time? Or what was happening? Why wasn't my name there? Anyway, that representative was kind enough and said, 'Don't worry, I'll take you to your hospital."" – FN Law



Bedroom in Nurses' Home, late 1960s.



ES at Hillingdon Hospital Nurses Home, Uxbridge, 1980.



AW outside Whittington Hospital Nurses' Home, 1976.

I felt like Elizabeth Taylor...

"Yeah it was just amazing because it was so glamorous and comfortable in the nurse's home. It was a carpeted room; a room to myself. I used to share with my sisters, we all slept side by side in one room, six of us on the mat. I wrote home to my parents and told them how luxurious it was. And the bathroom had a long bath that I could have bubble bath in. I said I felt like Queen Elizabeth...Oh no! Elizabeth Taylor. And we got our linens changed and everything. That was a luxury for us really. In Malaysia, I had to do the whole house laundry. We got wells to take water out, or walked 10 mins to the public tap to fetch the water."





KC – 21st Birthday Party.



Bus for free.

"I came here to do my training. I was in Chichester, Sussex and all very countryside. We used to pay for the buses. And if the bus driver said, 'Are you a nurse down the road?' I said, 'How do you know? Have I got "nurse" on my forehead?" He said, 'No, Chinese or other races...other than English either come from teachers' college or hospital. So you must be one of them.' I said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Okay, you go free.'" - FLow

FL received a Covid recognition award from the Mayoress of Barking, Jan 2024.

My first lesson...

"When I arrived at Heathrow... Having been brought up through a British Commonwealth country, my understanding was that British hierarchy were all white people. So when a white Porter came to help me with my luggage, well, I said no. I was embarrassed. A white man wanted to carry my bag! Not realising that that's his job. That was my first lesson of actually coming in contact with a white person that's not actually high up. So, he didn't carry my bag." – CY Lawes

Shower outside the bathtub.

"In Malaysia, we had showers by splashing water on ourselves from buckets of water. Obviously, you bring your culture with you. And that was what she did. She filled the tub with water; stood outside the bathtub and started to splash all over herself. When she finished, she then wondered where the water was draining too. Lord and behold! When the matron walked by and found the floor all wet. Only then did my colleague realise that she should have stayed inside the bathtub. So, these are all the differences of culture; we learnt from our mistakes. If you want to shower, you shower inside the bathtub not outside."

- SC Gunasegaran

One NHS, many nationalities

Around 265,000 out of 1.5 million staff reported a non-British nationality in June 2023. This amounts to nearly one in five of NHS staff with a known nationality.

Between them, these staff hold over 200 different nationalities.

ENGLAND.

One NHS, many nationalities

British/UK	1,151,394	Nigerien	1,146	Syrian	307
🔤 Indian	60,533	Slovak Slovak	983 🎽	Congolese	273
Filipino 📔	34,652	📉 Trinidadian	917	Libyan	265
Nigerian	22,851	Swedish	843	Eritrean	26
📕 Irish	13,711	👥 Myanmar	843	Russian	24
Polish	11,606	Czech	819	Mauritanian	24
Portuguese	8,339	🛚 Ugandan	797	Albanian	22
Italian	7,302	Zambian	785	Afghan	22
C Pakistani	7,082	Latvian	778	Motswana	22
Chanaian	6,134	💿 Brazilian	766	Swiss	21
Romanian	6,018	New Zealander	743	Lebanese	21
📕 Zimbabwean	5,917	😚 Hong Kong	736	Tanzanian	20
Spanish	5,114	💼 Iranian	638	Palestinian	20
Egyptian	4,148	Sierra Leonean	616	Slovenian	20
Nepalese	3,562	Singaporean	611	Estonian	20
Greek	3,469	🔚 Jordanian	605	Colombian	18
Malaysian	3,123	Iraqi	549	Saint Vincentian	17
< Jamaican	2,709	Suyanese 🔁	526	Barbadian	17
📴 Sri Lankan	2,683	Belgian	525	Ethiopian	17
German	2,576	C Turkish	470	South Korean	16
Australian	2,468	Cypriot	467	Algerian	15
Dutch	2,433	Danish	466	Indonesian	14
South African	2,226	Cameroonian	457	Saint Lucian	14
French	1,972	Thai	442	Bahraini	14
Lithuanian	1,948	Austrian	434	Grenadian	13
📻 Kenyan	1,936	Finnish	415	Saudi Arabian	12
American	1,734	* Somali	395	Mexican	12
Bangladeshi	1,659	Gambian	378	Moroccan	12
Chinese	1,476	Norwegian	365	Central African	11
Sudanese	1,465	Malawian	355	Serbian	10
Hungarian	1,448	Japanese	353	Namibian	9
Mauritian	1,354	Croatian	351	Dominican	9
Bulgarian	1,353	Maltese	349	Israeli	9
Canadian	1,318	Ukrainian	344	Tunisian	8

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09

BRITISH COUNCIL

British Council was founded in 1934, and their first overseas offices opened in 1938. Originally, it was called the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries.

The British Council established a representation for Southeast Asia, centred in Singapore, in 1947, which directed activities in the Malayan Union, British North Borneo and Sarawak. In 1948 an office for Malaya was established in Kuala Lumpur; in 1950 opened in Kuching. A representation for North Borneo in Kota Kinabalu was established in July 1961.



Gateway of Queen Mary's Hospital For The East End on Bryant Street E15, 2024. The arch's restoration was completed in 2022.

"The British Council was going round to recruit nurses from Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. They went round to Chinese, Tamil, English and Malay schools. My school was in Taiping that was how I was recruited."

- CK Tham

"The British Consulate came to the airport and pick us up. I think there were other people from other parts of Malaysia or other country came at the same time. So, we stay a night in the British Consulate Building..."

- CC Stevens

Greater London:

Greenwich Hospital Kingsland School of Nursing Royal Brompton Hospital Northwick Park Hospital Hackney Hospital Poplar Hospital St John's Hospital at Homerton St Thomas Hospital Metropolitan Hospital Highland Hospital, Winchmore Hill Bexley Hospital London Jewish Hospital Romford Old Church Hospital Central Middlesex Hospital Hillingdon Hospital Royal National Ear, Nose & Throat Hospital Claybury Hospital Whittington Hospital

Newham Area:

Forest Gate Maternity Hospital St Mary's Hospital, Plaistow Howard's Road Maternity Hospital Aldersbrook Hospital St Andrew's Hospital East Ham Hospital Queen Mary's Hospital Newham General Hospital Plaistow Hospital East Ham Memorial Hospital St Mary's Hospital Plaistow **Norfolk:** Norfolk & Norwich Hospital

Bedfordshire:

Fairfield Hospital

Exeter:

The Royal Devon and

Exeter Hospital

Peterborough: School of Nursing



Fairfield Hospital, Bedfordshire, 1972.

Yeovil & Somerset: Yeovil General Hospital

where were our Schools of Nursing in the UK?

According to our project participants, during their training, 70%-80% of the East London nurses were from Malaysia. Some classes had even 90%-100%, including some of the 'Psychiatric' and 'Mental Subnormal' hospitals.

Sussex:

Chichester Hospital

Hertfordshire: Lister Hospital Berkhamsted Older People's Mental Health Unit

> **Lancashire:** Wrightington Hospital

Yorkshire: Bradford Royal Infirmary



Clockwise from top left:

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Gill in a snowy day, Norfolk & Norwich Hospital, 1979; Lana in nurses cape, 1973; AW and Friend in lesson at Eastham Memorial Hospital, 1974; May Yau celebrated Xmas with colleagues in Forest Gate Maternity Hospital, 1977; Amy worked in geriatric ward in Plaistow Hospital, E13, 1975; Student nurse having lunch break in Nurses Home, 1974; Lana learnt a new machine, 1974.

Nurse Training

Nurse training required five 'O' levels and offered three years State Registered Nurse or two years Enrolled Nurse training in General, Psychiatry or Learning Disability (formerly called Mental Subnormal). Upon arrival, some nurses were redirected to courses not their choice; they were compelled to accept these changes imposed on them. Training combined working on the wards with classroom learning, culminating in a final written exam following successful practical assessments.

The Flying Squad

"When I first heard of the Flying Squad: 'Oh! The Flying Squad is... the Flying Squad is here and all that.' I was looking for the plane. I didn't realise it was the Emergency Team that responds to a crisis in the community. The ambulance would take the Emergency Team to the patient's house. The team consisted of a doctor, a midwife and an anaesthetist. I was involved quite a lot in the Flying Squad team. So you had to make sure you get all your gears ready and depending on the case, you may need to bring two units of blood with you as well."

– H N Ho

















Nurses' Badges, left to right: The Mothers' Hospital, Bradford Royal Infirmary, Fairfield Hospital Stotfold, SCM, General Nursing Council, Kingsland School of Nursing, Royal National Nose Throat & Ear Hospital, St Andrew's Hospital, Community & District Nursing Association.

The Sluice

"Nowadays, it's all disposable: urinal, disposable bedpan, etc. Those days, silver, heavy ones, bedpan and silver bottles. I always remember, during visiting time, we were not supposed to do anything with the patients. Nothing to do. No turnings. We were sent to the sluice instead of the healthcare assistant who did the cleaning. We had to tidy the sluice and clean the 'bottles' and bedpans. We used to immerse them in formalin with bare hands! By the grace of God, mine never had sores."

- F Low

Hong Nio awarded Hospital Badge at Forest Gate Hospital (Badminton Hall) after qualifying as a midwife, May 1976.



Just a very long day...

"We began purely practical and were taught by the ward sister and the staff nurse. We were the only nurses helping the staff nurse to settle patient, to do all the nursing chores. Then after the shift we went back to the nurse's home. We worked 42 hours per week including four nights duty and long days with split duty from 7:30am till 12 noon, at home for 4 hours rest, and then back to the ward from 4:00pm to 8:45pm. We never heard of agency nurses. So that is how we were working on the ward. It is very hard, it's just a long day, like working 12 or maybe 13 hour shift, even though you have four hours in between time. You're not resting because you're already working in the morning and then rest for four hours and I just felt very tired."

– T Wong

Right: HN with colleagues at Forest Gate Maternity Hospital, 1980.

Left: Amy worked with a colleague in Ward Round, Plaistow Hospital, 1975.





What did we think about Matron?

Matron is a bit stern so everybody had to be prim and proper. 'Oh, Matron's coming!'. **So, we had to be on our best behaviour.** – HL Ooi

Matron Miss O'Kane really looked after us. – T Wong Now the sisters and the matron all go out to the pub with us. It is very different in those days, no, you don't go near them.

- KF Low

Matron was very fierce we thought. – SK Teoh

I was so grateful that the matron

accepted us. She loved Malaysian nurses. – FN Law The matron was scary. I always hid. I hid in the laundry room.

– KC Glendinning

Matron was very strict.

Especially when coming to making beds. We had to make sure the corner is right. – CC Stevens

The matron was in charge of the whole hospital then. We don't have much dealing with her. – A Fisher

Career

After Nursing Qualifications, some followed their career pathways for specialist nursing e.g. Midwifery, etc., whilst others were forced to apply for other courses e.g. Psychiatry, etc., to extend their stay. Some found positions in private sectors.

NHS offered opportunities for career progression to become Clinical Nurse Specialists in different disciplines such as Palliative Care, Diabetes Care, Neonatal Intensive Care. After further training, they would become Nurse Practitioners and into Management. Some pursued careers outside nursing. Some were juggling between careers and raising a family.

Went back after 16 years.

"After I got married, I did carry on working as a bank nurse. I was on the bank night duty. My kids were young...so I did night duty and then my husband would look after them. Then we branched out to our own business. We opened a coffee shop for about 16 years; then finished. And after 16 years of nursing...after 16 years of doing business, we had enough. So, I gave up that business and went back to nursing! So, I did the refresher course. Great changes in nursing, BIG CHANGES!"

– М Рара

NHS Champion

"During general nursing, I chose my three months secondment in psychiatric at Shenley. I felt that I was better suited to help people with emotional and mental health issues. It was challenging because of our Asian background understanding British people, in UK. It was a whole new concept for me.



Community champions: winners and runners-up at The Savoy are, front row from left: Dennis Renton, Hilary Rattue, Tammy Lee, wed Masroor Ali, Jane Burgess; back row: Steve Heather, Kevin Marshall, Ian Stuart-Maitland, Rob Carpenter and Emma Prescott

Before I became a Community Psychiatric Nurse, I was a Registered Mental Health Nurse in institutions like Claybury Hospital in 1991. Then I became a Community Mental Health Practitioner. In 2012, I was awarded both the Employee of the Year, and the Nurse of the Year; and my third award was London NHS Champion 2014 with £5000 from the Evening Standard Newspaper, because I did go the extra mile. With psychiatry nursing, once you reached 25 years of service, the retirement age was 55. When my time came, I decided to retire because it was getting very, very pressurised."

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From Mental Nurse to Lecturer

"Well, we moved around quite a bit, just to get experience. I was employed as a Registered Mental Health Nurse at Claybury where I got a first teaching job as a Clinical Teacher. And I went on to do Teacher Training Certificate. And then, we moved over to university status. And then after that, I joined the London Southbank University until I retired.

I think my bosses were pretty good and supportive. And the NHS was good to me because every time we have a promotion, it gave us certain benefits. So I did my Psychology in the evening at the University of East London, and then they paid for me to do the Master Degree at the University of Brunel."

– R Lee







Clockwise from left:

Sister HO in Forest Gate Maternity Hospital, 1977; Esther at Special Care Baby Unit at Hillingdon Hospital, 1980; KH's Certificate and Badge for the completion of 12 months Midwifery training, 1976; MY with colleagues at Christmas celebration, 1982.

From Law to Nursing to CQC

"I came to England to do Law and got a Law Degree. While working in the Chinese Community Centre, I came across a lot of people who has mental health problems, I can't help them, they were so stressed. I then changed my mind to do Mental Health Nursing. You know, at that time nursing is only Higher Diploma but I already got a Law Degree. I love nursing. So, that's how I became a nurse.

I believed that you can change people's life. I went to a Community Team as a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). Then I joined the Older People's Team that provides treatment for patients, 80% of them with dementia. I was a Team Leader at the time, then I was the Advanced Practitioner Team Leader at the time, and then I become the Sector Manager when I was awarded the Employee of the Year for my Trust in 2020 during COVID for my leadership. I still work as a Specialist Advisor for Care Quality Commission (CQC) since 2014. I have done inspection with them. So, CQC can change things, if anything's not right, you know, you can point out. The Management has to change; The Trust has to change the way they work to make things good."

- Grace T

Leisure

Nurses worked 40-hour week with night shifts. During days-off, nurses cherished their time with friends: doing shopping and lots of eating, majority shared cooking in the nurses' home. On special occasions, they would eat out in Chinatown and/or Malaysian Hall for affordable Malaysian food. In those days, budget European holidays were nurses' favourite. For those supporting families, leisure could mean working extra shifts as agency nurses to earn extra money to send home.

There were some who managed to find their love; they met through holidays, clubbing, friends' house parties. However, it was difficult for some due to the un-social working hours.



Birthday meal with Malaysian & Filipino nurses in Nurses Home at Norwich Thorpe St Andrew's Psychiatric Hospital, 1978.



Agency Work

"In fact, during my training, I don't waste time. During my days off, I was doing some agency work. I registered myself with the agency and then I rang them, 'Oh, I have my days off, this and this.'. They said, 'OK, I look up for you if there is any hospitals or any area where they would need an Auxiliary Nurse. In my third year, I was given a job as a baby-sitter looking after a baby in Bayswater during my days off. I had been with her for three months. And do you know the two days agency work is equivalent to my one month nurses' training wage." – SC Gunasegaran

Kooi Chock (right) – 1973, "we love shopping in Romford Market during day off from our SRN training in Romford Old Church Hospital, in my self-made fashionable clothes."

Empire Ballroom

"I can always remember going up to Empire Ballroom on a Thursday, because it was nurses' night and it was a free night, that's it. We'd stay on till round about, I don't know, two o'clock in the morning. And then round the corner was Chinatown and it was one restaurant that always stayed open, twenty-four hours, Canton Restaurant. I'll never forget it. So we'd all go in there, have whatever, noodles and all that, and then we'd get a taxi and share the fare to take us back. Then go to work the next day at seven o'clock." – A Walker

R Mathews with the Queen at Opening of Newham General Hospital, 14th December 1983.



MALAYSIA HALL

Malaysia Hall in London was set up by the High Commission of Malaysia for Malaysian students in UK. The Malaysian Hall Canteen provided authentic Malaysian cooking at reasonable prices for Malaysians and their guests. It was also a hub for students to meet, to socialise through activities like outings, talks, debates, parties and festivals. It also provided temporary accommodation for Malaysians. "The only two places we went and met, cheap places to go was Malaysia canteen, we could smuggle our friends, but not Caucasians, take them in go eat, we paid 50p. And the other place is Hong Kong embassy. It's all gone now." - CK Tham



MALAYSIAN NURSES SOCIETY

Malaysian Nurses Society (MNS) was set up in 1979 by a group of nurses including the late AK Wong. Many nurses felt lonely and isolated, especially when encountering challenges during and throughout their transitional phases of life in the NHS. The MNS saw the needs and challenges of Malaysian nurses and visited most nurses' homes to support the new arrivals and those in need.

"During our campaign to recruit nurses for the formation of MNS, we allocated nurses to visit various hospitals in London and the countryside, we then gave Talks to them regarding the importance of forming MNS." - CK Tham

MNS organised social activities e.g., hiking trips, summer camps, parties and educational meetings, to raise awareness about the nurses' plights and entitlements, to empower them in dealing with difficulties/ challenges that they faced throughout their training and careers. MNS continued to support their fellow Malaysian nurses until the late '80s!

Left: Summer Camp by MNS, 1976. Right: Talks by MNS in Malaysia Hall, 1976–1979.

- **GT**





"In 1983, 35 Malaysian Nurses in St Andrew's Hospital were given notice to quit as soon as they sat for their final SRN exam, even though they were initially promised two years' work permit on recruitment. Following consultation, MNS put them in touch with the Nurses' Union, leading to support from Neil Kinnock and local MPs (late Tony Banks and Ron Leighton), who wrote supporting letters to the Hospital and the Junior Health Minister, resulting in a meeting in the House of Common."

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Clockwise from top left:

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Malaysian Angels of the NHS Heritage Project Reminiscence & Co-design workshops with Eastside Community Heritage after lunch, on: 11/1/24 at NCA; 15/11/23 at MCLC; 25/1/24 at NCA; 10/4/24 at MCLC.

Lan

Retirement

Many nurses had to retire early due to stress or work-related health issues. For most, retirement is freedom to spend more time with loved ones, childminding grandchildren. With the newfound time, they could travel freely whenever it is affordable, and make new friends. Some choose entrepreneurship or volunteering, e.g. CC Stevens volunteers with London Theatres, bringing affordable theatre experience to all in the community.

Others work part-time, sharing their knowledge with younger nurses and doctors. We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of nurses, especially those who came out of retirement to serve during the COVID-19 Pandemic, despite the significant stress and danger they and their families faced.

Pandemic.

"As a Clinical Specialist in HIV, I worked for 2 years till it's decommissioned. 2018 I joined NHS111 as Call Advisor. Then Pandemic crisis occurred. The most stressful and harrowing time for us and the public. There were daily changes in the guidelines and protocols which affected advice we gave. By the time we returned the backlog of calls, we were at the receiving ends of the public frustrations. The constant verbal abuse became too much, I left from burnt out." - S Wong



Retired nurses lunch at Stratford 2022.



A Walker volunteering with Catching Lives in Whitstable, Kent 2023.

Still Catching Lives

"I have been with Catching Lives, the voluntary work that I do now for the homeless people in Canterbury. I see so many youngsters now and so sad that they are out on the streets. They have jobs but they can't afford the rent. Catching Lives is a Day Centre; they can come in to have bath, showers, hot meals, breakfast...it's always there. Catching Lives was awarded the Best Charity of the Year from Kent Council in 2023."

– A Walker

I am busier than ever.

"My plans were not God's plan, instead of traveling, I was so privileged to childmind my 1st grandson, such joy and bonding. In between volunteering for St Joseph's hospice, I also helped out initially at Newham Chinese Lunch Club. As a Member of Church Management Team, we set up the Malaysian Chinese Lunch Club to reach out Malaysian nurses and a wider community to provide a space for home-cooked meals and meet-up. I am busier than ever!" – A Fisher



MCLC Chinese New Year Celebration at Stratford Methodist Community Centre, 2019.

Amy/MCLC Mondays Walking Group at Stratford Olympic Park, 2024



Amy/MCLC Merdeka/Independence Day Celebration at M Papa's house, 31/8/22.



Late AK volunteered in Moorfields Eye Hospital Field Trip in Uganda, 2017.

Volunteering in Uganda

"After a long service in the NHS, Ah Keeu retired when she was 68 years old. In recognition of her long service with Moorfields Eye Hospital, Moorfields awarded her a trophy, a fitted tribute for her dedication to the patients and the NHS. Ah Keeu volunteered to work in a project in third world countries with the Eye Specialist Team from Moorfields. On one trip to Uganda, she wrote to a friend that it was very hard work but added she was touched by the Ugandan people. After retiring, she continued to volunteer in field work trips in between part-time work at Moorfields." – Tribute to late AK Wong, one of the founders of MNS by Ms HM Ng in April 2022

Appreciation and Recognition

Some of our participants received recognition by patients, NHS and other wider communities for their dedication and commitment to exemplary services. These are some of our stories.



Staff Nurse Keen warmed my heart by her caring attitude, efficiency and remarkable inclusivery as she made her exuborant way around the ward for a full 12 hours. Florence Nightingale with attitude!

This card, drawn and written by a very grateful patient at Moorfields Eye Hospital, singled out "Staff Nurse Keeu" for praise. MG, the patient, compared her to Florence Nightingale for her "exuberant way around the ward".



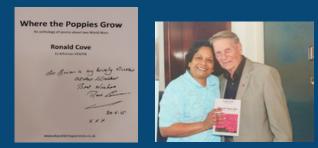
Tammy was featured in Ilford Recorder in 2009 when she retired from 36 years service in Mental Health. She was winner of three awards on Employee of the Year, Nurse of the Year and NHS Champions in 2004.



Cecilia Lam was featured in My London News and Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway in 2024 to recognise her 50 years' service with Northwick Park's Neonatal Unit looking after premature babies.



Esther volunteered in London Olympic 2012 to show the world the kindness and friendships. A Game Maker!



'I would also like to thank Nurse Althea Walker of Chestfield Medical Centre for introducing Denise Smith to me.' - *Ron Cove*

Author of "Where the Poppies Grow"

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone involved for your invaluable contributions.

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Sue Wong Suet Tan Ying Tan Sylvia Lau Tammy Lee Tricia L Wong Trudy Wong

Families & Friends

B Mei Carl Dewey **Charlie Copperwaite** Chris Goh Helina Goh H M Ng Ezra Goh Helina Goh Jeff Reynolds Jim Conboy Sam Lam Sandy Low Stuart Taylor Suet Tan Ying Tan Yen-Yen Teh Families of Gill Tan Friends & families of late AK Wong

Newham Chinese Association

Wendy Wan Elaine Cheung Yvonne Yau Sau Lai Yau Sui Kuen Yip Maggie Leung W K Choy Freda Lau Louise Kelly-Orme Anna Li Chi Ming Li Gill Tan Stella Townson

Supporters from Newham &

Wider Communities Sir Stephen Timms MP Mei Sim Lai, OBE, DL Sarah Owen MP Unmesh Desai AM Councillor Joy Laguda Rev Elizabeth Osei Dr S C Ang Simon Aston, CEO of NUH Catriona Rowland Ciji Varughese John Turnbull Jyoti Singh Lisa Taylor M Wright-Simpson Meeling Ng Mirela Kuksa Nardita Saha Richard Davis Suzanna Walker Umme Kulsum Ums Yohana Wade Staff Team at Stratford Circus

Eastside Community Heritage Judith Garfield, MBE

Aiden Chen Callum CC Elaine Norman Kaaren Cruse Manasi Elise Tomy Rachel Dyball Sophie Seeyave Georgia Dimdore-Miles

True Heart Theatre

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The National Lottery Heritage Fund Selina Papa Francesca Peri Communication Team

Malaysian Chinese Lunch Club

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Peal Point Tailor in Malaysia Yvonne

Partner Organisations



The Newham Chinese Association (NCA), established in 1987, serves the Chinese community in the London Borough of Newham and neighbouring boroughs. Our services include weekly recreational activities, health and civil information talks, trips, and communal meals. We also assist members with accessing local services through interpretation, translation, and advocacy. Working closely with other statutory or voluntary organisations, we can empower the Chinese community in London by removing language and cultural barriers.

https://newhamchineseassociation.wordpress.com/



Eastside Community Heritage (ECH) collects personal stories and oral histories from people in London & neighbouring counties, with a focus on London's East End. Their Hidden-History archive holds over 4,000 oral histories and about 40,000 photographs and videos, capturing the history of diverse communities, occupations, migration, and more. ECH uses this archive to run community projects, workshops, exhibitions, and reminiscence sessions, fostering inclusion and recognising local heritage. They also offer training in oral history and support local grassroots groups in their development.

https://www.hidden-histories.org/



The Malaysian Chinese Lunch Club (MCLC), previously the Chinese Women's Club and an offshoot of the Newham Chinese Association (NCA), has been running for over 10 years. Hosted by the Stratford Methodist Church and staffed by volunteers, the club offers a hot Malaysian/Chinese home-cooked meal at an affordable price on the second Wednesday of each month. It's a gathering place for retired Malaysian, Chinese, East, and Southeast Asian nurses and others to socialise, reminisce, and enjoy occasional talks, as well as walks and outings.

https://www.bryantstreetmethodist.org.uk



True Heart Theatre (THT) creates theatre to deepen connections between individuals and their communities, believing in the power of the performing arts to inspire, move, and drive both personal and social transformation. Since 2006, we have provided a platform for diverse voices, working in mainstream scripted productions and applied theatre contexts. Led by volunteers who are full-time actors, actresses, and lecturers in performing arts, our aim is to give people, young and old, the chance to reflect on their experiences, learn from each other, and find joy in stories brought to life on stage. https://trueheart.org.uk/

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR STORIES.

Want more? Explore our website for more information on the Malaysian Angels of the NHS.

https://eastsidecommunity.wixsite.com/malaysianangels



Reminiscence and Co-design Workshop at Bryant Street Methodist Community Centre, 8/5/24.

Thanks to National Lottery players for making this project possible!



For further information, please contact Newham Chinese Association. newham2002@hotmail.com