

'These are the hands'

The future of the school nursing workforce

Despite difficult times, it is important to keep perspective and great research and practice shows that the future of school nursing is in good hands. Sharon White explains

Sharon White OBE, CEO SAPHNA

In my position as CEO of the School and Public Health Nurses Association (www.saphna.co) it's all too easy to get sucked into the negative stuff; services overwhelmed by demand, ongoing disinvestment, redeployment, high attrition and sickness rates, etc. While, of course, these are key issues on which our professional organisation must and does constantly act, I was reminded last weekend when I received a 'virtual showcase event', from the course leaders of the Specialist Community Public Health Nursing course, why it is so important to keep perspective. This has been so much harder since our work moved to remote and, therefore, fewer opportunities to meet, listen, observe, and feed the school nursing soul!

The showcase contained around 20 PowerPoint presentations with voice-overs and accompanying narrative,

explaining the public health issue they had identified in practice, the project they had embarked on and the evaluation thus far. The breadth of subject matter, analysis, critical challenge, reflective and evidence-based practice, as well as presentation/teaching skills, were very well demonstrated through the inspiring and innovative ways the students had approached their public health work through the most challenging times out in practice. Importantly and, to be admired, they also shared where and why things had not quite worked or gone to plan.

It was equally impressive as this cohort, the first ever, was taught all virtually (apart from the exam) and, despite all the obstacles they have navigated this year in university and placement, there are some fantastic interventions that have been achieved. We must also acknowledge the incredible

*'These are the hands
That touch us first
[...]
And touch us last.'*

'These are the Hands', read the full poem by Michael Rosen (2016) for the 60th anniversary of the NHS at: <https://bit.ly/3ontt95>

and unfazed course leaders, practice teachers/placement supervisors and placement colleagues, who also rapidly adapted, redesigned, delivered, and supported while also undergoing their own very steep learning curve.

Later in the week, alongside her course leader and one of our academic advisors, I met with yet another prospective SAPHNA student ambassador. It was humbling and an absolute pleasure to listen, share and learn about her student experiences, her drivers, views, vision and, although relatively new to school nursing, the previous life and professional skills she is already bringing to the service. Her course has facilitated her

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to hold strategic meetings, empowered her to navigate and bring constructive challenge in only the way that students can; that refreshing and innocent approach that we so often need, and while I am not ageist, a younger, insightful, and invaluable opinion. We need to capture much more of this. Watch this space for ongoing developments, including an announcement soon regarding a national community of practice event for all SCPHN SN students!

The inbox has been hot too regarding our ongoing call to arms regarding more research from school nursing and, it is beginning to happen! Consultant public health nurse, and long-standing SAPHNA committee member, Jess Streeting, is at the beginning of her PhD. Paul Watson, lecturer in nursing (children and young people) and SAPHNA academic advisor is nearing the end of his. We are currently also supporting another application for a PhD for a school nursing colleague in Wales. This alongside many others undertaking dissertations and much more is very exciting and encouraging.

I am in meetings soon with the National Forum of School Health Educators, the United Kingdom Standing Conference on Specialist



Community Public Health Nurse Education, Health Education England, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and will be attending a roundtable event regarding workforce hosted by Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. I will be sure to help keep the conversation real by ensuring we acknowledge and celebrate more our future workforce! It is heartening to know that it is in good

hands. **CHHE**

Rosen M. These are the Hands. 2016. Scottish Poetry Library. Available at: <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/these-are-hands/> (accessed 2 February 2022)

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