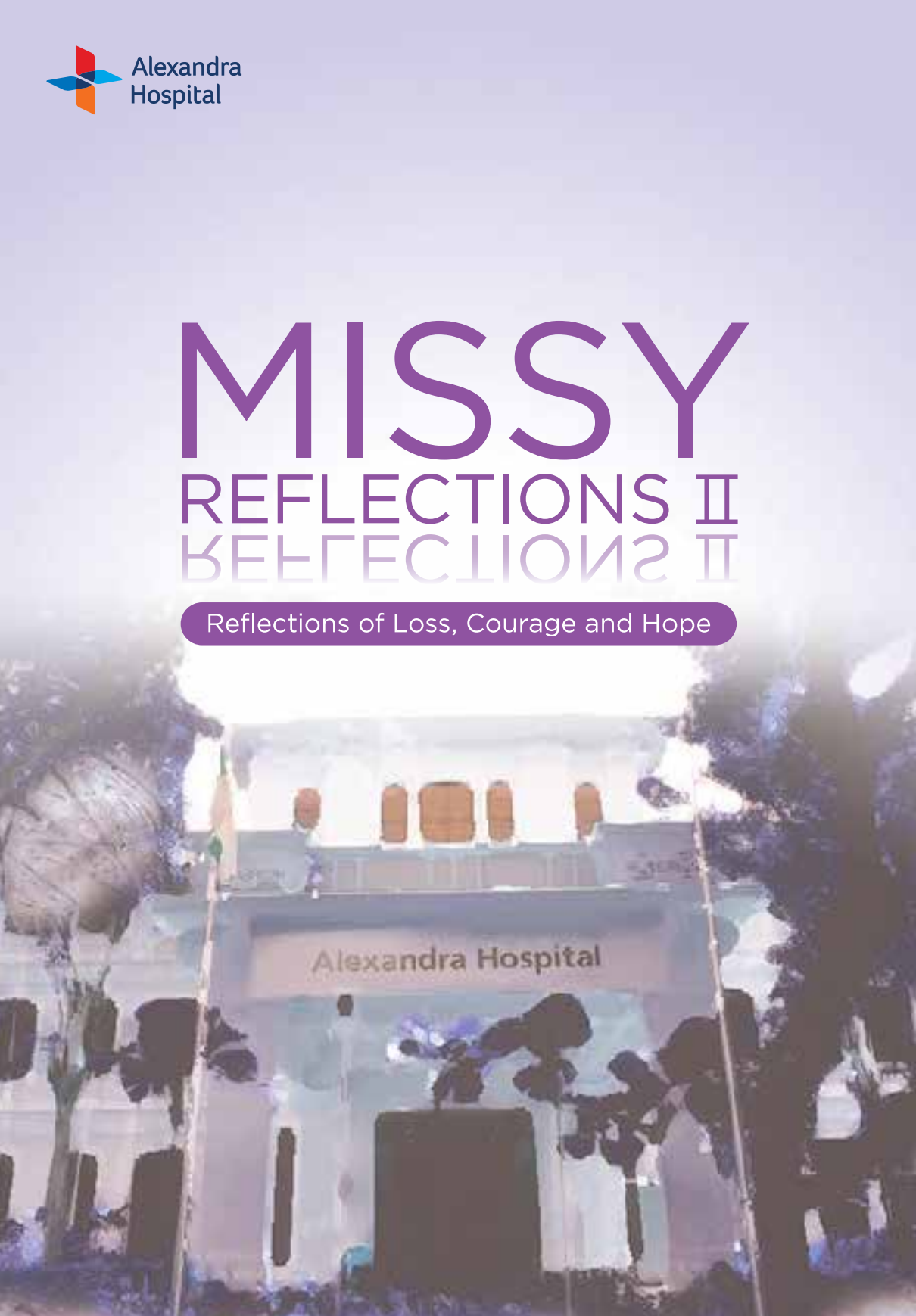


MISSY

REFLECTIONS II

REFLECTIONS II

Reflections of Loss, Courage and Hope



Alexandra Hospital



The artist of AH building on the cover is Dr. Khoo See Meng, AH's Chairman Medical Board.

Preamble

This is a second collection of reflections by nurses from different backgrounds, ranks, nationalities and even eras over the year. They had started their careers in other hospitals including the early days of Alexandra Hospital.

Today, many of them still serve in Alexandra Hospital. Entitled "Missy Reflections", the short essays are reflections which emerge after having undergone experiences. In nursing, the use of reflection is a key tenet of and valuable tool for learning.

There can be expressions of positive and negative feelings about an event, and ultimately re-examining the experience in an effort to understand and to plan how he or she would act in a similar situation in the future.



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Foreword

If I were to ask, how did you live through the past two years as the world confronted COVID-19, what would you say? On 23 January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Singapore. Across the healthcare family, we were all on the alert for new developments in response to the then-developing spread of COVID-19. The days that we lived through was an unprecedented period of our time. Humanity across the world experienced darkness of endless uncertainties at a scale that tested our strength and unity to breaking point. As the world placed its eyes on healthcare, the epicenter facing the pandemic, every person that served within it and all other frontline industries were thrust into the limelight, albeit under circumstances that could have been better. There was a new-found appreciation for roles and industries that would often be overlooked. This realization is reflection in action.



Much has changed across the world since the days of initial reports of COVID-19 cases. Within Nursing, many of us have witnessed the immense toll the pandemic took out of every nurse and those who matter to them. Since our first Missy Reflections publication in April 2021, we have amassed a collection of 50 reflections sharing stories across 5 categories that are close to our hearts, many of which are deserving of more attention and conversations.

In a chapter dedicated to foreign nurses, readers will get to learn more about how the experiences of foreign nurses practising in Singapore, the sacrifices they make in order to devote their lives to caring for our population. To nurses, our foreign colleagues are very much integral to the family we have at work. Many friendships that we develop are for life and it is priceless witnessing each other go through various life stages.

The effect of the pandemic has taken and will continue to take a heavy toll on mental health and relationships. With increasing focus on mental health and its contributions to overall well-being, hear firsthand from our nurses about its effects on them and their relationships. This is a subject matter Alex Nurses are passionate about.


In the chapter on male nurses, our nurses shed light on perspectives of practising within a female-dominated profession. Our male nurses bring valuable insights and balance to the Nursing profession, supporting our ability to be stronger in diversity and in seizing various opportunities to advance nursing.

The pandemic resulted in disruptions that are both welcomed and unwelcomed. We pay tribute to our nursing students who are the future nurse leaders. They have had their learning hastened when they entered the practice setting sooner than expected to continue with their development under the supervision of practicing nurses, while they provided the much-needed augmentation to the nursing workforce during the pandemic. This generation of nursing students had experienced a disruption that most of us did not encounter when we were in nursing school. The pandemic has developed their tenacity and adaptability far beyond what a typical academic year can offer. They are our hope for the future of nursing.

Readers will also gain insights through the reflections of our nurses about our Alex Culture, the hopes our nurses have for the Future of Nursing, as well as other perspectives that matter to them.

My sincere gratitude to all Alex nurses and nursing students who contributed generously to this edition of Missy Reflections, providing a comprehensive view of topics close to our hearts. My thanks also go to friends from the Alex Communications Team for their strong partnership in this publication. Last but not least, my thanks to the people; patients, family members and colleagues that our nurses have encountered, who have taught and shaped their learning and growth.

Ms. Margaret Lee
Chief Nurse, Alexandra Hospital

A photograph of a green and yellow bird perched on a bare tree branch against a clear blue sky. The bird is facing right and is the central focus of the image. The branches are dark brown and leafless, creating a complex network of lines across the frame.

Chapter 1

Birds of A Feather Flock Together: Our Alex Culture

Some birds are not meant to be caged. Alex nurses describe how they found their own flock within the fun and unique organisational culture that sets Alexandra Hospital apart from other hospitals.

Image courtesy of Mr. Melvin Poon, Head of Allied Health at AH.



We Love to Care

American nurse theorist Jean Watson said, “Caring is the essence of nursing.” Truer words have never been spoken.

At Alexandra Hospital (AH); we care, and we love to care. From doctors to nurses, each one of us treat our patients with empathy and love. We ensure that we put ourselves in patients’ shoes and think from their perspectives as much as possible, and never let our opinions on a certain situation influence them in any way.

Throughout my career, I have worked in private hospitals until I joined AH in April 2020. Initially, I joined AH with some hesitation but the moment I entered the hospital, I instantly fell in love with the place, its culture and surroundings.

Here, our leaders encourage us to speak up and ensure that our voices are heard. They not only listen but they ensure that any problems are resolved as soon as possible, which really amazes me. Their constant motivation, support, and guidance spur us to achieve our goals and ambitions with joy.

The AH Intensive Care Unit (ICU) team has given me great opportunities in my nursing career to cherish through the unique services provided here that go an extra mile for our patients. One example would be the Sun Shine Therapy programme, where long-term ICU patients are brought to tour around the hospital grounds for a few hours to people-watch and soak in the fresh air and sunshine. We also organised Zoom video family conference calls for the Covid-19 positive patients in the ICU.

These are some of the great initiatives by our ICU nurses amidst our busy schedules that add colour and give hope to our patients despite the difficult times that we are facing as a nation. I strongly believe that these efforts will allow our patients to not only think positively but also aid in their recovery.

Proud to be an Alexian!

Reflection by: Ms. Antony Raj Mary Kala Rani, Senior Staff Nurse II

My Passion in Nursing was Reignited

In 2020, just a month after childbirth, I was introduced to attend Alexandra Hospital's (AH) Alex Open House. The moment I arrived at the hospital entrance, I was welcomed by the cooling breeze and greenery that reminded me so much of my hometown in Malaysia. I was impressed during the walkabout at the Rasa Sayang Ward and Integrated Care Clinic which gave me a different insight into the model of care in AH.

I made the decision to sign up for a job in AH. The ambience and human touch in AH had reignited my passion in nursing, and I have been upholding this passion till date.

Two days before my official start date in AH, I received a call asking me if I was willing to support the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) due to my past working experience in ICU. I was apprehensive and doubtful of myself as I have left the field for more than five years, as well as fearful and worried that the Covid-19 pandemic might affect my young children. To my surprise, my husband was very supportive and encouraged me to go ahead with the national calling as he knows that it takes years to train an ICU nurse and he was very sure that I can gain my competency back in no time.

I was given the opportunity to attend a Crash Course at AH. It was inspiring and motivating to see colleagues from Operating Theatre, Endoscopy Centre and Ambulatory Surgery Ward during the training as some of them shared that they had zero experience in critical care, but they were brave to take up the challenge to support the service in ICU when there was a need. Their perseverance and courage was exhilarating to me. These encounters have caused me much soul-searching and I decided not to shy away but to share my knowledge and guide my colleagues whenever they face difficulties and doubt.

Fast forward to today, I am now working in the Integrated Care Clinic but whenever I reflect back to the times that I spent in the ICU, I have no regret. I am endlessly grateful that the two-week Crash Course provided me not only with the latest ICU knowledge and skills which allayed my professional anxiety, but also gave me the chance to meet a group of colleagues from the ICU, Operating Theatre and Ambulatory Surgery Ward, who have become my good friends and who I can turn to for help and advice when I face challenges at work.

Reflection by: Ms. Er Biaw Thean, Senior Staff Nurse I

We Decided Against Rules and Convention

“To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part...”

A vow recited by many, a vow kept by some, a vow lived by a few till the end. How many of us can truly say that one’s partner was there for an entire lifetime? To be a witness to this fairy tale was one of my brightest memory in a long time.

Both of them were sickened by Covid-19 and were admitted to the same hospital, but in different units. One day, she deteriorated and had to be nursed in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Her world was confined to a room for a couple of weeks, the world which used to be her love and their children. Though wards apart, the lovebirds kept in touch through video calls, updating and encouraging one another. The times that we visited him, he was always sharing their stories, and how strong a woman she is.

Her condition improved and was subsequently transferred to the same cubicle as him. They spoke and laughed like they were before, despite their conditions – a testament that love knows no disease. After further improvement, she was transferred to a transitional unit to prepare her for the next phase of care. She was on course to recovery when her lungs decided to give up on her again. This time, it appeared to be worse than before. She spoke to her family on the phone for hours to share her words before she was placed on life support.

Her condition rapidly declined throughout that day despite the best of care. We called her family down urgently to spend time with her during those moments, but there was someone who hadn’t visited her; her loved one. He was still on oxygen support and bedridden, and there were concerns of safety. However, what better place could there be than in the ICU?

We decided against rules and convention, went to his unit and wheeled him in his bed to be beside her. He had an oxygen finger probe on his right index finger. Upon removing the probe, he immediately reached out and held her hand, and he held like it was the first and last time that he would ever hold. That moment broke everyone in the room and everyone felt the love they share. If we needed one memory to know what true love is, they were showing us.

He was beside her, holding her hands, stroking her hair, praying for her through those darkest hours. There were times where her vitals deteriorated to a point that was incompatible with life, but he held strong. At this point, her care was capped as she wasn't responding to treatment. But he never once stopped holding her.

I left for home, feeling glad that he was there beside her for this last journey, but was also burdened with the thought that there would be so much heartbreak for him because she was slowly fading away.

"There are only two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." – Albert Einstein.

I came to work the next day with heavy feet. As I entered the unit, I walked into a miracle. There was a certain buzz in the air, and the team was hurrying about. I walked to her vital monitor and saw that her blood pressure had improved to almost normal levels. The decision thereafter was to decrease the sedation infusion to assess her conscious level.

When instructed, she opened her eyes and blinked to commands, we held our breath and looked at each other with the understanding that this was nothing comprehensible by medicine nor science. I asked the medical consultant jokingly, "What is this medical diagnosis?" She looked at me, and I said, "Love and prayers."

There are many times we seek logic in life, and will not be comfortable if there isn't any. However, there are also times that no logic can explain what we encounter. That day, we witnessed a miracle in poetry, a love story that touched the heavens.

*Reflection by: Mr. Darren Goh,
Advanced Practice Nurse and
Nurse Clinician I*



We Dare to Challenge Boundaries

I am inspired to take a walk down memory lane to reflect on how I ended up in Alexandra Hospital (AH).

I was a paediatric-trained nurse for more than 15 years. After graduation, I joined the paediatric ward of another hospital and had a fruitful and wonderful time, providing me with plenty of opportunities to excel in my nursing career.

It all came to a head in 2020, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. I saw how the entire healthcare system was out in full force fighting what would be a long-haul battle. Many of my colleagues fought with tears and sweat, but with resilience and perseverance as well. I thought that maybe it was time for a change, for me to move out of my comfort zone and challenge my own limits. The pandemic seemed like a good catalyst for that change.

Around the same time, my close friend and colleague told me that some of our colleagues were joining the AH team. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that AH seemed very different from the mainstream hospital care model. My curiosity was piqued to find out more about this unique hospital.

There is no perfect timing, but serendipity found its way and my decision to join the AH family in December 2020 came fast and furious. While those around me asked me to think twice before making such a big change in my career, my mind was fixed. I understood the uncertainty that I would face in my new role, switching from nursing paediatric patients to adult patients but I was sure that I would be able to adapt with time.

After almost a year in AH, I have witnessed how the hospital truly exemplifies its purpose statement: 'We redesign healthcare with and for humanity'.

It sounds unbelievable, but these heartwarming gestures by Alexians are almost a daily occurrence – We greet everyone in sight, even strangers; we hold the lift for each other; colleagues will buy each other breakfast quietly, helping all to start our day with a smile on our faces. From hospital to community, this is what I call the “kampong spirit” of AH. Every single Alexian tries our very best to fulfil the needs of our patients and their loved ones. We dare to challenge boundaries in order to create many precious moments for our patients in a safe environment.

In management, AH practises a bottom-up support system. In another words, the bosses are no longer at the top in the organisational chart. Over here in AH, our leaders are right at the bottom to support every employee. Every Alexian has a voice. There are multiple engagement platforms to ensure all staff are looked after and our needs taken care of.

From the bottom of my heart, I am thankful for everyone that I have crossed paths with in AH. In my short time here, the trust and opportunities offered to me has been beyond my expectations. I'm so proud to be an Alexian. While I'm thankful to my previous employer for creating a solid foundation for me; AH has truly brought my nursing career to new and greater heights.

Reflection by: Ms. Jasmine Wan, Nurse Educator I

Heart Lifters

The initial years of my nursing career have been focused in the Cardiovascular Medicine discipline. After 12 years where I moved from a Cardiovascular Medicine general ward to a high dependency unit and finally a Cardiovascular Laboratory, I suddenly felt the need to move out from my comfort zone to do more and challenge myself. With the ageing population in Singapore and changes in my own family members, it triggered me to make a decision to move into community care nursing or chronic disease management for patients and caregivers.

I saw a fellow nurse sharing about Alexandra Hospital (AH) on social media. It caught my attention and I was curious so I messaged her for more information. From the conversation, I got to know about AH's Integrated Care Clinic. The care model she described was aligned to my own belief of what a healthcare system should be, so I decided to join the Integrated Care Clinic in AH.

Joining a brand new discipline meant that there were many things for me to learn and process. I was delighted and glad that I had very supportive supervisors and teammates who taught and guided me along the way. I also upgraded myself by attending webinars and workshops related to chronic disease management. I was given opportunities to follow doctors' consultations in the clinic as part of my on-boarding programme, which gave me deeper insights and to learn and familiarise the disease processes and the treatment plans. I was then impelled to think about how to educate patients more effectively.

I feel that patient education will only be effective if we could customise each education plan to each patient's living conditions, lifestyles, work habits and other factors. The Integrated Care Clinic nurses taught me to look at things from the patients and families' perspectives, which I may have neglected before. I am inspired by our Integrated Hospital model and the commitment to provide holistic care for our patients.

However, working at AH is not just about such 'serious' topics. The Alex culture is fun and innovative. My personal experience is that the AH leadership and fellow colleagues welcome all ideas, no matter how unusual, to improve work processes. The Alex culture also encourages more compassion and humility among colleagues and friends at work.

In the nursing department, we have Heart Lifters who go around almost every month to cheer and boost the morale of staff, as well as Virtual Happy Hour during lunch to let the nurses to catch their breath and have fun. The sessions are always full of joy and laughter. All these were actually ideas generated from discussions among nurses. I truly cannot see this happening anywhere else other than AH!

At the hospital level, there are also town hall sessions with senior management that help to address many issues and challenges that staff face at work. I admire our management's honesty during these sessions and feel that they truly represent the Alex culture.

Reflection by: Ms. Yanly Soh, Nurse Clinician I

A Small Gesture of Kindness Goes A Long Way

I feel very grateful to be able to work in Singapore as a nurse. My journey in Singapore started in an oncology ward in another hospital. Over the years, I was given many opportunities to grow as a nurse. In 2012, I received the 2012 Healthcare Humanitarian Award from then President, Mr. Tony Tan. The feeling of pride and joy of receiving such a prestigious award was indescribable.

I then received an opportunity to further my nursing studies in palliative care. I was eager to learn more about palliative care as I wanted to care for my ageing mother and mother-in-law. I was selected to move to Alexandra Hospital (AH) to care for palliative patients. Shifting to a brand new environment was difficult as I had to move out from my comfort zone. However, with little effort and a lot of support and care from my new colleagues, I was able to adapt to my new ward in no time.

Each day working in AH is an opportunity for new challenges. Instead of wallowing in the discomfort and anxiety of a new environment, I focused my energy into contributing to the future of AH and working with my team to brainstorm about how we can increase efficiency in the workplace.

We were hit with the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, with many of us foreign nurses not being able to go back home to visit our families. With our colleagues' support, we managed to pull through the toughest period.

I lost the two most important people in my life to Covid-19; my mother and my mother-in-law. I was not able to even visit them at their last moments to say goodbye. My colleagues and my superiors were amazing in sharing their concerns and kindness with me.

In palliative care, I always put my patients in the place of my parents – taking care of them as I would for a family member. I faced many elderly patients with Alzheimer's disease and dementia; and some patients were erratic with uncontrollable behavior changes. With the right team, we were able to overcome these challenges even as we refine operational changes as AH expanded with more wards opening.

I am currently involved in community care and I am very excited to be using my expertise to help my patients and their families outside of the hospital setting.

I am extremely thankful for all the support from my team in AH, especially to the Sisters in the wards who were supportive in grooming me to grow and encouraging me to improve myself to be a better nurse each and every day. I always believe that even a small gesture of kindness goes a long way. My journey at AH has been fulfilling and I look forward to continue to grow as a nurse here.

Reflection by: Ms. Myint Myint Than, Nurse Clinician II

Mentoring the Next Generation of Ambitious and Innovative Nurses

Life brings many opportunities, and oftentimes, these opportunities come disguised as challenges. I have discovered the truth of this saying in my over 40 years of nursing.

When I left the National University Hospital (NUH), having relinquished the Director of Nursing (Chief Nurse) role and the subsequent Senior Director position, I had no specific expectations with regards to future roles. I was open to any and all new experiences. So it was with much gratitude, that I accepted the opportunities at Alexandra Hospital (AH): to join a vibrant, forward-looking leadership team and mentor the next generation of ambitious and innovative nurses. These elements became very evident when the pandemic happened in 2020.

Covid-19 unearthed vivid memories of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003. This time round however, I was on the 'outside looking in'. I was not operationally involved and did not have functional responsibility in AH. Understanding the challenges that lay ahead, I wanted so much to offer help and be involved. Thankfully, there were opportunities where I could contribute.

As Covid-19 invaded the community, there was a dramatic rise in the number of cases involving migrant workers housed in dormitories. I volunteered myself for weekend shifts in the Mobile Medical Posts which were formed to run out-patient services and carry out swabs at the dormitories.

I also provided help in setting up Community Care Facilities (CCF) to house positive cases with no or mild symptoms. Other areas of opportunity to help were in training and audits for other private operators, in areas such as PPE, gowning, hygiene and other measures to maintain cleanliness, sterility and other high infection control measures. I am glad and proud for these opportune moments to assist and contribute to the team.

Now that the initial frenzy of activities and response to the pandemic has somewhat settled, I am able to reflect over these past two and a half years that I have been at AH.

The AH approach to patient care is different. The clinical model is team-led and programme-based holistic care. The services are tailored to fit the skill-set and meet the patient's need. Over these years, much progress has been made toward this goal. The team tasked to bring this change is committed, courageous and candid in their pursuit.

The nurses in the AH Nursing family are not new to me. I know about two-thirds of the nurses as many were previously attached to NUH, and they have made the brave move to cross over to AH. I am impressed by their eagerness to progress, by their drive to accomplish their goals, and by their hunger to prove themselves. They have found the right environment and the right opportunity to shine.

I am confident and hopeful in the potential and promise of the Alex nurses. I see this in the nurse-led programmes put in place at AH. I am most upbeat about the progress of nursing at AH not only because of the nurses and leaders, but also because of the Chief Nurse. In 2021, AH's Chief Nurse was presented with the President's Award for Nurses, the highest accolade for the nursing profession.

When I stepped down from top-level responsibilities at NUH, I had thought to do less work, but maintain just enough to keep me going. Now, I find that even though I work part-time, I feel like I am doing more; with so much that has happened and is happening. I wonder what role I can play in this fast-moving healthcare environment.

For the moment, I am happy to continue this supporting role: contributing in Clinical Risk Management, assisting in the Out-Patient campus re-development and tracking, and mentoring, encouraging and applauding the current team. Looking ahead, I believe I am able to help in developing leadership skills, in enhancing soft skills, as well as in strengthening networking and connectivity ties. I could complement the development of healthy personal well-being for the nurses by addressing mental health issues, by helping nurses realise joy in their work, by building resilience, and by reinforcing positive attitudes. I intend to go on learning, unlearning and relearning whatever I need to keep myself current and relevant in my present supporting role.

Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.
- John C Maxwell

*Reflection by: Ms. Yong Siu Yin,
Assistant Director of Nursing*



Back to Nursing

In July 2020, my dream to restart my career as a nurse came true. I left nursing about 12 years ago due to family commitments. Since then, I often dreamed that I was on the ground nursing patients in my uniform. I was always looking forward to the day I could return to nursing. I was given an opportunity to attend the Back to Nursing Course, and thereafter I received a job offer from Alexandra Hospital (AH).

There are many changes to the nursing profession after 12 years; the care model, care demand and professional competency have evolved significantly and beyond my imagination. I learned that nurses can now access patient's medical records in a centralised digital system; and patient care and nursing interventions carried out to patients are updated in the electronic medical records as well, hence enabling the healthcare team to receive timely updates in whichever location. Besides, nurses now use an electronic tablet to administer patients' medications, which help to reduce medication errors resulting from illegible handwriting. I was amazed by the advancement in healthcare settings. At the same time, all these systems were new to me, and it took time for me to familiarise the system navigations. Once I mastered it, it did help me to save time and increase work productivity.

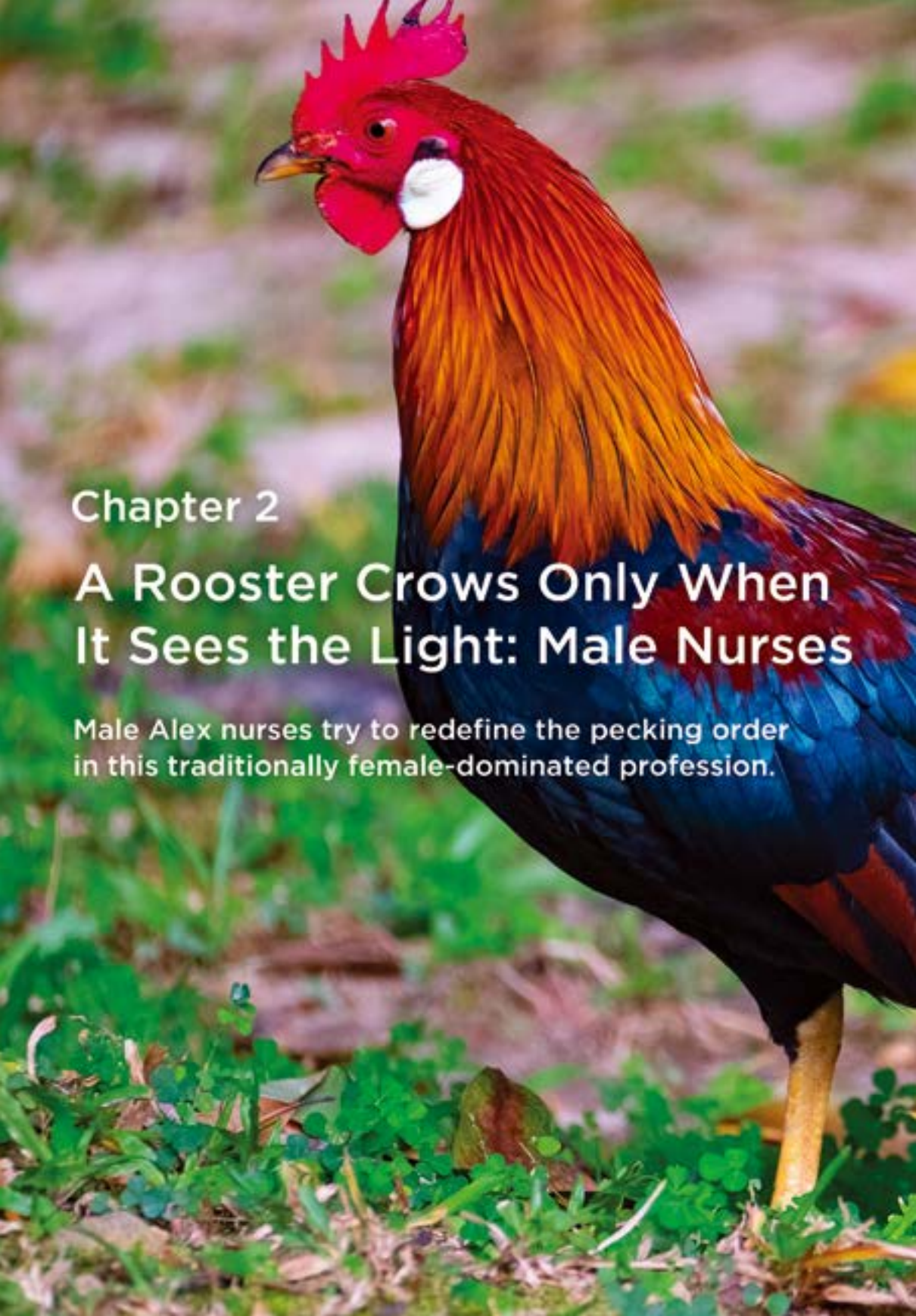
After I passed my probation, I was deployed to a polyclinic to help with the vaccination programme in the community. I was pleased with this opportunity as it broadened my exposure to work beyond the hospital setting. I worked in the polyclinic for four months, wherein I vaccinated thousands of people. I was proud of my experience because I feel that I have done my part to contribute to the national fight against Covid-19 as a nurse.

At the end of the polyclinic deployment, I requested for a transfer to work in the outpatient clinic due to family commitments. I felt blessed that my supervisors were willing to facilitate the request. Their support had again echoed my first impression of this hospital, that the leadership team is very friendly and helpful. I also appreciated their positive feedback that I am a nurse with a good attitude – this reinforced my belief that a good attitude is important whatever your vocation is.

Even though I have restarted my nursing journey for more than a year, I know I still have a lot to learn. I believe I have the advantage to continue to upgrade my knowledge and skills by being surrounded with many experienced senior nurses in the clinic.

I am thankful for my current working environment in an Integrated Care Clinic in AH - not only are my colleagues friendly and helpful, I am also exposed to vast learning opportunities to gain advanced knowledge and skills to manage patients with multi-comorbidities.

Reflection by: Ms. Liu Fang, Staff Nurse I



Chapter 2

A Rooster Crows Only When It Sees the Light: Male Nurses

Male Alex nurses try to redefine the pecking order in this traditionally female-dominated profession.



Image courtesy of Mr. Melvin Poon, Head of Allied Health at AH.

How You Make People Feel Is More Important Than What You Do For Them

Almost 20 years ago I made a decision to leave my teaching career to join nursing. My parents were disappointed, thinking that nursing is a dirty job. My friends questioned if I can take the tormenting shift work.

Since young, I have always loved plants and animals more than humans. Being a nurse has never entered my mind. As I saw my parents age year by year, I was frightened by the prospect of having to look after them – I would not know how. The thought of nursing being able to be a long-term career for myself while at the same time equipping me with the knowledge and skills to take care of my loved ones attracted me. I have never looked back since.

Nursing is definitely not a bed of roses. In fact, it is filled with fear and trepidation with a fair amount of denigration. After all, the job itself mostly involves taking orders from the doctors. Nurses are also caught in challenging situations as we often have to explain for decisions that were not ours to make. Adding on to the stress is the expectation to meet the requests of patients and fellow healthcare colleagues alike.

Then why have I stayed on in nursing after so long? Nursing allows me to experience life vicariously through my patients at the times when they are most vulnerable. It toughens me up and prepares me for the most dreadful life eventuality of sickness and demise. When I witness the unpredictability and impermanence of life events, good or bad, it is easier for me to let go of any hard feelings and treasure the present. In a way, nursing has made me a happier person.

Short of sounding clichéd, I also derive deep satisfaction in what I am doing as a nurse. Though I have little say in patient's treatment plan, I find I still have the capacity to offer comfort and better their experience in their time of illness. It is a reminder of the meaning and purpose of my vocation as a nurse when my patient turned around and told me they felt better or were able to do things they could not before.

No doubt that while the competency skills of nurses are important, the art of nursing is often the neglected aspect. Strict rules and regulations can cause us to lose sight that we are dealing with humans with emotions who often grapple to have control of their circumstances especially when they are at their most vulnerable state. Over the years, I have realised the importance of communication in nursing. As the saying goes, how you make people feel is more important than what you do for them.

Being a male in a female dominated profession, I am often asked about the difference between me and female nurses. There is indeed some inconvenience in the care of female patients especially the younger ones. However, a great majority of the patients are elderly and most are comfortable with me assisting them in their toileting needs. I suppose it has to do with me keeping a professional front, communicating and expressing care for them. Gaining patient's trust is therefore of utmost importance.

There has been an increasing emphasis of mental resilience recently for nurses. I cannot agree with this more especially when nursing manpower is more often than not in shortage. No one can claim to have the mental resilience to meet any challenge, including myself. There are times when I have been overwhelmed at work, though I find mindfulness practice and staying focused on the task at hand helps. At the same time, I will ask what is the most important thing that I can do for the patient that will make the greatest difference to his or her condition to set my priorities right. Keeping myself healthy by working out and eating well and adopting the right mindset to problems or setbacks are also important.

My wish for the nursing profession is that it will develop to become a well-respected career choice not unlike the medical profession in time to come. What will I say to people who want to join nursing? "Do you feel a sense of satisfaction when you take care of a person well?" If the answer is yes, nursing will be a good career choice.

My life as a nurse is meaningful and purposeful. After all these years, I have realised that a happy life is not a relaxing life – it is one that presents you with the opportunities to resolve one problem after another. I am grateful that I have been given the learning and training support throughout my career to become a better nurse that can take on more challenges.

Reflection by: Mr. Ivan Ho Hock Hai, Senior Staff Nurse I

Male Nurses Can Be Gentle Too

The term 'Missy' was used to refer to young ladies by the British during the colonial days in Singapore, probably derived from 'Miss'. The local Chinese, speaking mostly in dialects during that era, might have pronounced it in the Hokkien dialect and called the nurses, young or old, as 'Bee See'. After several decades, things have changed, improved, and evolved.

Who could have imagined there will be electronic medical reports that we can access with few clicks using one metal device when nurses in the past had to flip through boxes of documents just for one particular patient file? Who could have imagined the possibility of negative pressure rooms when Florence Nightingale was figuring out how to improve room ventilation? Who could have imagined the existence of male nurses when 38 women are all the manpower Florence Nightingale was able to mobilise when they were sent to Turkey to care for Britain's wounded army during the Crimean War?

As a foreign and freshly graduated male nurse, I would say I am always learning through overcoming different challenges in multi-racial and cultural Singapore. When I first arrived, I was not sure how to care for female patients whose religion did not allow physical contact with male nurses. As my time in Singapore grew and with increased interaction with friends and colleagues from different cultural and religious backgrounds, I gradually learnt more about how I can provide care for female patients with respect to their individual culture and religion. With male patients, they are reassured that male nurses can better empathise with them.

Male nurses are definitely not commonly seen in the ward. Sometimes, patients will confuse us with other healthcare professionals. One contribution we are surely proud of is being able to transfer patients more efficiently due to our natural advantage in physical strength. It comes in handy in ward settings.

I am aware that the public may think of male nurses as less gentle and blunter in terms of communication. Thus I am always learning how to be firm with patients without sounding rude or aggressive, keeping the discussion as objective as possible. This gentle giant dynamic also extends to my colleagues, as I always try to joke around and bring some laughter in the ward.

A Rooster Crows Only When It Sees the Light: Male Nurses

Every nurse contributes in our own unique ways, whether we are male nurses, female nurses, student nurses or senior nurses. It could be as basic as helping patients to get the utensils and tissue out from the plastic package; or it could be reviewing the nursing care plan holistically – we all are working towards one same common goal: to help discharge our patients back into society and improve their quality of life. Each nurse can contribute to make a great team.

Reflection by: Mr. Leo Wong Sai Ho, Staff Nurse I

The Nursing Field Benefits from the Diversity of Having Male Nurses

From the beginning, I have always wanted to become an Orthopaedic nurse. After secondary school, my mum encouraged me to join nursing as she knew I had the patience and temperament to be a nurse.

Currently, I am a male nurse specialising in Orthopaedics. I care for patients who have fractures and make plaster casts for them. Over the course of my nursing journey, I have navigated through some challenges in a female dominant profession.

Men in the healthcare field are able to provide a different perspective and help make some patients feel more comfortable. We may not be as gentle or expressive in showing our care and concern as our fellow female colleagues – however, male nurses can contribute by being calmer, assertive and decisive in our patient care. The nursing field benefits from this diversity.

Joining nursing as a male is something unique and different but it will equip you with essential life skills and experience during your journey that will have an impact on peoples' lives. At the end of the day, having the interest and passion in whatever you do and how you are able to help people matters the most when it comes to nursing.

Reflection by: Mr. Mohamad Ridzwan, Senior Staff Nurse I

Hopeful Future for ‘Murses’

This day marks the end of my first year working as a nurse, and it has been quite the journey leading up to this point. Being a nurse was certainly not what I had envisioned for myself during my childhood or teenage years and if given a choice, I honestly do not know if I will go down this path again. Life however, made that choice for me, with a sudden illness requiring lifelong prescription medication that derailed what chances I had with my original career plan.

Choosing the nurses’ scrubs came by coincidence, stemming from my Red Cross background during secondary school as well as my own morbid fascination with the condition that ailed me. The turning point came during my National Service when, in the midst of mulling over my next steps, I became friends with a nurse who had just completed his polytechnic diploma. Hearing his experiences made me decide to try my hand at nursing, and here we are five years later. I think it’s been going pretty well so far.

As a member of that rarer species known as male nurses, I believe we are still perceived differently compared to our female colleagues. Throughout my various clinical postings as a student nurse up until today, there are some common reactions I would get whenever I introduce myself to patients or their family members. They range from mistaking me as their doctor, to some variant of “Oh, when are you continuing on to be a doctor?” or “Alamak boy ah why you want be nurse when you can be a doctor?”.

I daresay even the title ‘missy’ itself has feminine connotations, a relic of a bygone age, and it is strange hearing younger relatives or patients use that term to refer to me. I don’t believe a female doctor would get questioned about their motivations on why they didn’t choose to be a nurse, so it is odd that I do get the reactions that I get sometimes. Nevertheless, there are some positive ones from the more liberal members of the public, such as how it is good that I’m here and we need more males in nursing. I do think we provide a different sort of energy and comfort to our patients, and that male patients are more comfortable confiding in me. I remain hopeful that in the future, ‘murses’ will be more accepted by the public and nursing itself can be seen as a viable, even masculine career path for men.

Reflection by: Mr. Tang Yang Yew, Staff Nurse I

Compassion Has Nothing to Do with A Person's Gender

“YOU WILL CLEAN PEOPLE’S BUTT”; “YOU WON’T GO FAR IN NURSING”; “NURSING FOR AH GUA” – Those words are still fresh in my mind after all these years. It was never an option to choose nursing as a career but never have I regretted it once.

With nursing traditionally seen as a female profession, being a male nurse is never an easy journey. I have always had this motto in life: “Create a positive impact in someone’s life”. Positive impact can be anything from saving someone’s life to making their bed for them.

I truly believe that the healthcare industry does need male nurses. One of the misperceptions I have faced is that male nurses aren’t as compassionate compared to our female counterparts. There was an incidence where I was refused by a patient because they feel that I was not compassionate nor competent enough. I was affected because after all these years of hard work, people will still judge me just by my gender. On the other hand, I never took it personally. Compassion has nothing to do with a person’s gender. I believe male nurses enter into nursing for the exact reason to put others before themselves.

Male nurses do play a very important role in the healthcare industry. Male nurses tend to be favoured due to our strength and physique. Male nurses can provide stronger support when it comes to assisting in transferring patients and whenever they need to be turned. For me, I’ve always compared the nursing approach to my days in the army. It is similar in terms of both the pressures and excitement of not knowing of what will happen next. Lastly, I do believe that men also have a very different perspective than women on a lot of things, and it’s a good thing to have different perspectives within the profession.

More men in nursing can help explore or debunk misperceptions that surround nursing. Nurses of all genders have equal ability to excel. There is no gender predisposition to the profession. In Alexandra Hospital (AH), I see more male nurses hired and I can really see the changes they are creating in the organisation. Truthfully, it feels good to see male counterparts moving towards the same goals as everyone else.


A Rooster Crows Only When It Sees the Light: Male Nurses

The issue of manpower sustainability in nursing in Singapore will always be a talking point due to our ageing population. It is important to implement some strategies to deal with the shortage of nurses, such as a system that involves education, work environment and advancement of technology to reverse the current trend of nursing shortage. I believe that it is vital to educate the public on the importance of taking care of their health.

Being an Alex nurse is unique as AH is a new hospital charged with innovation, redesign and breaking new ground on the healthcare horizon. The integration of technology and innovation is a good thing as it enables the hospital to have the right system to provide holistic care from inpatient to rehabilitative care. There is never a dull moment or day in AH and I am grateful for the opportunities and upgrading courses that are provided for junior nurses. AH is more than just a hospital or workplace for me – it is my second home where I feel welcomed by both my peers and superiors.

My hope and aspiration for the future of nursing is to provide excellent patient-centred care. Patient satisfaction and experience will always be our priority above cost reduction and clinical quality. The journey to be a nurse will never be an easy road, but it will be a rewarding one. The organisation, the culture and most importantly, the people in AH support one another and celebrate each other's success. For example, I was recently nominated for the Nightingale Award. It is indeed a boost in my confidence and motivation to strive even harder in achieving my dreams. The future of AH is bright, and I can't wait for what's in store.

Reflection by: Muhammad Rizam, Staff Nurse II



Chapter 3

From the Outside Looking In: Foreign Nurses

Many Alex nurses left their home in foreign lands to contribute their skills here. Foreign nurses share their sorrows and successes over the past two years of pandemic unrest.



Image courtesy of Mr. Melvin Poon, Head of Allied Health at AH.

A Nurse in A Foreign Land During a Pandemic

I have been a nurse for 27 years; more than half of my life. I started working as a nurse in a foreign country which is Saudi Arabia. I worked there for seven years after which I decided to venture to Singapore in 2004.

In 2020, when the pandemic struck, my whole family in the Philippines was badly affected. My dearest mother was Covid-19 positive and was hospitalised for a month in the ICU. I was shocked when my sister told me that my mother was in critical condition. The worst thing was that there is no available room in the ICU for her. So they created a mini ICU to be able to give her the treatment that she needed. She was intubated and needed to be on a ventilator.

I was desperate to go home but there was a lockdown and I was not able to fly back home. I took leave to at least monitor my mom even just through video calls. As a nurse, it was very painful for me to just watch and not be able to take care of my mother when she was in such a critical condition. It was one of the hardest situations I have ever been through. I was not even able to touch and hug her while she was in pain.

One of my sisters needed to sacrifice herself and stayed 24/7 with my mother. She also contracted Covid-19 during that time. Although she was also sick, she endured it just to take care of our mother, who had impaired vision. Our mother was diagnosed with Pulmonary Tuberculosis four months before she was hospitalised. She developed Rifampicin toxicity that caused blindness and it was irreversible. It was difficult for her and she needed to have someone to be at her side constantly.

My father, my two sisters, and their families were all Covid-19 positive but asymptomatic. They were in quarantine for 14 days. It was a very tough year for my family. The only thing I was able to hold on to was the faith I had in God and made sure to keep myself strong for them.

My prayers were answered. After three weeks of quarantine, my family was free from Covid-19. My mother recuperated well and was discharged home. Although she has not recovered her vision, we assured her that we will be her eyes as long as she is with us.

I know that many of the foreign nurses in Singapore have similar stories during this pandemic. Some of them may have a more painful story than me, and all of us are just hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel and reunite with our dearest family. I always say this to myself and to my staff, "Be strong now, things will get better. It may be stormy now but it can't rain forever."

*Reflection by: Ms. Belale Leodelyn Abacan, Nurse Manager I
(Ms. Leodelyn is the MOH Nurses' Merit Award 2022 recipient.)*

We'll Always Have Each Other's Backs

I've always considered myself as a "toddler" in the nursing profession even though it is already my seventh year in this challenging career. I believe there are many other foreign nurses out there, be it in Alexandra Hospital (AH) or other institutions who left their home and family to come to Singapore in order to seek a change and improvement in their career track. I think the hardest part of being away from home are all the travel restrictions that were in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, knowing that I might be a 'walking virus' and have a high tendency to infect my family members due to my job.

However, even with all these uncertainties and challenges, I bravely embarked on a whole new journey into Critical Care Nursing and joined the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) unit in AH. Never had I expected myself to embrace these new changes that changed my whole point of view in nursing since I have been working in the A&E department for the past six years. In the A&E, we are usually dealing with fast-paced and high turnover rates of patients. Therefore, I seldom had the opportunity to engage with patients on a deeper level, unlike in the ICU.

We recently lost a few patients in our unit, with whom I had created meaningful memories. The support and understanding I get from their family members while I nursed their loved ones was great psychological encouragement to me to always provide 'extraordinary' care to my patients. For me, it simply means to always think ahead and also step into my patients' shoes to feel things from their perspective.

My practice in the ICU also made me realised that people will always have many regrets left undone or unsaid; there were times when I hear or see how the family members grieve and remain in a state of denial. All these incidences really enlightened me that we should always appreciate and cherish our time together with our family and friends because life is always fragile and death is unpredictable but inevitable.

When my own parent fell sick in my hometown recently, the desperation and guilt I felt when I could not be near to support them physically was incomprehensible. It tore me up completely and I could totally understand the sadness within the family members when they were restricted from visiting their loved ones in the ward.

With all that being said, I am glad that our unit had a bereavement debrief session with our ICU consultant and colleagues recently. This session allowed us to express our thoughts and feelings as it was a challenging week for all of us having dealt with two deaths in a day. This is in fact a very precious moment to me being part of this AH family knowing that we will always have each other's backs no matter how difficult our day would be. I believe all these life experiences that we are collecting right now will not only help us in nursing our patients but also build me up to be a better person.

Reflection by: Ms. Bong Quan Yi, Staff Nurse I

Getting A Warm Hug From Your family Just Hits Different

I came to Singapore to learn new things in nursing. I wanted a challenge to see how much I will grow as a nurse not just in my country but internationally. It was hard at first but with the help of all my colleagues, it has been a fulfilling journey. As a foreign nurse, at first it was nerve wrecking each time I walked into the ward. Now it feels just like my normal routine and I feel a sense of accomplishment to help other people and see how they improve.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, it was so hard for all of us because we cannot go back to our hometowns and just be with our families. I am so thankful for the advancement of internet which helps families who are apart to connect face to face. My hometown was greatly affected by the pandemic with many cases of Covid-19. There was never a day that I am not worried about my mother and siblings as they are all working in the medical field. I am proud that they are helping in the fight against the pandemic, but at the same time, my anxiety grows everyday not knowing what will happen if they suddenly caught the virus and I am not there.

The last time I saw my family was in January of 2020, when I travelled home for 10 days to attend my friend's wedding. Within a few weeks of coming back to Singapore, Covid-19 erupted and travel restrictions and lockdowns were put in place. I could only pray for the safety of my family and friends in my hometown.

My housemates here in Singapore are like my family. We came from the same province in the Philippines and went to the same school and work in the same hospital. Though we all have our differences, I feel very lucky to have them. We all helped each other through this tough period. My colleagues in the ward also provided support and strength for me - even though the workload was heavy, we still manage to smile and laugh because of the teamwork and friendly environment.

Once the travel restriction lifted, the first thing I would like to do is to go home and just spend time with my family. Even if we do nothing, spending time with them is my state of tranquility. I think it will help with my mental and spiritual health. And I believe I am not only speaking for myself but for all the foreigners working in different countries. Going back to our hometowns and seeing our loved ones in good health mean so much in times like these. Getting a warm hug from your family just hits different.

Until then, I have a few coping mechanisms in Singapore. Eating is essential so I always try to eat what I want and not to be afraid to try new foods. Baking is also something I enjoy, more so than cooking. Spending time with friends and going out of the house just walking around the neighborhood especially near the seaside also helps, as my province in the Philippines is near the sea. We also find time to explore new attractions in Singapore. Pandemic or not, I just hope for everyone to be safe and healthy.

Reflection by: Ms. Cantago Kristine Joy Mejia, Senior Staff Nurse II

I Am A Nurse, Even Before I Became A Mother

On 13 March 2020, I boarded a flight to the Philippines in preparation for the second birthday of my son. It was the initial phase of Covid-19, wherein everyone was mobilised to take part in all the safety and infection control measures carried out by the hospitals and governments worldwide. While in the Philippines, I was not able to enjoy my time due to the lockdown. I just spent as much quality time as I could with my family. Eventually, with the restrictions and border control measures implemented by the Philippines and Singapore, my 'vacation' was cut short and many plans were intercepted. I had to return to Singapore by any means if I wanted to keep my job. I arrived back in Singapore on 19 March and was put on Stay Home Notice for two weeks. Consequently, I never got to attend my son's birthday.

Looking back, I had a lot of realisations. Had I thought through carefully before making the decision to go home, and taking into account the present situation, perhaps I would not have to go through such a dilemma. But as a mother, my only desire is to be there for my son for every special occasion or milestone. It is always a struggle and challenge for parents like me, who chose to be away from their children because of work.

Another thought that came to me is that I am a nurse, even before I became a mother. It is in my nature to think and put others' welfare before anything else. I wanted to contribute and do my part in our fight against Covid-19. Honestly, even before the pandemic, we already had our own battles – may it be in terms of patient safety, standards of care, or our own personal issues and development, amongst many other things. Maybe the impact and implications were different, but in the end what matters is knowing our purpose as nurses.

In my 13 years of nursing experience, I have been to various wards and exposed to many disciplines in the adult setting. I even went to isolation wards and Covid-19 community facility and dormitories. Although it has been exhausting, it is also fulfilling in many ways. I will forever be grateful for the experiences, knowledge and skills I gained along the way. I wouldn't be where I am today without it, as well as the people who trusted and inspired me to persevere. I realised that "gratitude turns what we have into enough".

This pandemic has truly affected us in ways that we never imagined. I may have missed my son's birthday – and it likely won't be the only one – though it is disheartening, I need to keep moving forward, and think of the light at the end of the tunnel. We need to find our strength in order for us to move and carry on with life. And while I am waiting for that day to happen, I am glad to be of service in any way that I can.

Reflection by: Ms. Cherell Bryne. D. Duran, Assistant Nurse Clinician

"When Are You Coming Home?"

I have dreamt of two things since I was young – First, to go overseas, and second, to build a family. However, things didn't work out according to plan. I got pregnant at the age of 24, the same year that I was supposed to go abroad. I chose to stay and get married, and was subsequently blessed with two adorable kids. Life went on smoothly as the years passed, with both my husband and I progressing in our careers. Going overseas was low on my list of priorities.

However, after 10 years of juggling a nursing career and parenting in my home country, I decided to take the leap to move to Singapore to advance my career and our family's financial standing.

Amazed, astonished and surprised – those are the words that best describe how I feel about this country the moment I landed in December 2019. Little did I know that Covid-19 had already begun its surge in China. Months passed, and living with Covid-19 became more challenging. Wearing a surgical mask became the norm, travelling was banned temporarily and heightened restrictions were implemented strictly in the entire country. I was horrified by this pandemic and so was my family back home. As Covid-19 intensified around the world, my hopes of reuniting with my family became weaker. Video calls became the only way I can stay connected with my loved ones, and tears became a nightly occurrence.

Despite missing home, I developed friendships with colleagues here. They lifted my spirits and kept my hopes high, filling in the gaps for my family over the past two years. Amidst the stress of Covid-19, we somehow managed to create activities to boost our morale. I have been slowly adapting to the culture in Singapore because of friends and workmates who stand as my second family and made this country my second home.

Two years have passed. Two years in a row I have not celebrated birthdays with my kids. As painful as it is, we know it's for our own safety. My eldest son is old enough to understand the situation but constantly asks me, "When are you coming home?". My youngest on the other hand, wants to become a superhero and fight Covid-19 by himself. Both are heartbreaking to me. My husband is just thankful knowing that I am safe and nurses in Singapore are well taken care of.

Each and every one of us has different goals and priorities. As a working mum, my goal is to nurture the future of my family and that is one of the reasons why I ventured overseas. I thought it would be easy, but it gets harder each day. Now, I finally know what it feels like as an OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker).

Dreams change, and the two things I dream of now are – First, to go home, and second, to be with my family again. Nothing more, nothing less.

Reflection by: Ms.Gonzaga Anna Lisa Alambatin , Enrolled Nurse II

“You Take Care of Other People with a Good Heart, and Good Things Will Surely Come Back to You.”

Being a foreign nurse in Singapore during the past two years of the Covid-19 pandemic has not been easy for me.

In 2020, as the Covid-19 cases were surging, I was deployed to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) for three months. As someone new to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), I found the opportunity very insightful, though I felt scared at the same time. Thankfully, the NCID staff were very nice and patient in sharing of their expertise and advice. I met many ICU-trained nurses from different hospitals who also taught me a lot of things. I am very grateful to my superiors from Alexandra Hospital for giving me this great opportunity to learn – I definitely felt more confident in taking care of ICU patients after my stint in the NCID.

2021 remained a challenging year. Due to the travel restrictions, I have not been able to visit my parents for two years. With the surge in community cases, we received numerous Covid-19 patients to ICU, many of them elderly. As I performed my job on the frontlines of Covid-19 in Singapore, I received news that my family in Myanmar also got infected. I experienced various emotions – stress, sadness, anger and guilt – because I was unable to go home to care for my family when they needed me. I cried whenever I spoke to my mum on the phone, but she always reminded me, “You take care of other people with a good heart, and good things will surely come back to you.”

She inspired me to pull myself together to give my patients the best care I can. My ward leaders and colleagues were very supportive and they always looked out for me. My sister also worked as a nurse in Singapore, and she was an immense pillar of support. Luckily, most of my family survived Covid-19 with the exception of my grandmother, who succumbed to Covid-19 due to her old age.

These two years taught me a lot of things. On the positive side, I managed to see many of my patients recovering from Covid-19, coming out from the ICU and discharged to home. However, I also experienced some heartbreaking moments when patients did not make it. It made me realise how important it is to cherish time with my family and loved ones.

Many of my colleagues also fell sick with Covid-19. With fewer staff being able to work, I saw how our leaders stepped up to cover the duties and settled our manpower shortage. Our team grew stronger throughout the good times and bad times, and I consider them to be my second family.

It seems like we are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, with travel restrictions lifted and foreign nurses like myself can finally go home to our families in 2022. I am so happy to see my colleagues reuniting with their families, and I am looking forward to my turn soon!

Reflection by: Ms. Jue May Kyaw, Senior Staff Nurse II

From Third World to First World: A Nurse's View of the Healthcare System and Life in Singapore

My journey to becoming a nurse in a country like the Philippines was a challenging one. I came from a poor family consisting of nine children in a province located North of Manila. Being the youngest, I saw how my parents and siblings struggled so that we can meet our daily needs while trying to get an education. Early on as a child, I thought long and hard about what course to take in college so that one day, I can uplift myself and give back to my family. After I graduated from secondary school, I decided to take up nursing. My decision was largely influenced by my close friends who wanted to go abroad and earn big money.

But unlike my close friends who went to Metro Manila to study in big universities, I was content to study for my nursing degree in a nearby local university which was what my parents and siblings could afford. While our teachers are very good, equipment was usually lacking or old and dilapidated. More than the long hours we spent in the hospital, what made it tiring was seeing how most of our fellowmen couldn't get proper medical attention and care. This strengthened my resolve to graduate, get my license and land a good nursing job, perhaps in the big city.

After passing the nursing licensure examination in 1996, I got employed in a local private hospital in our province instead of one in the big city I was dreaming about. Due to the meager pay, I resigned after a year to join the military. Being a military nurse was not an easy task. It really opened up my eyes on how important it is to provide utmost care and attention to soldiers, a segment of the population who have committed their lives to protect the country and its people. I learned to appreciate the job and career I have chosen. I could have stayed longer serving in the military hospitals because I felt I was contributing something to the country. However, I couldn't deny the fact that I was not growing any younger and have to think of my family and our future. I began looking again at the prospect of becoming a nurse abroad and this was when an opportunity in Singapore arose in 2007.

As a nurse, it was a dream come true in the sense that I get to practise my degree in a country where health care and services are very modern and advanced. In between doing my job as a nurse, there were opportunities provided to me to further advance my knowledge and skills which boosted my self-esteem and confidence. I was really amazed that the proper medical care and attention that I only read in nursing books when I was in university or foreign movies featuring medical stories that I watched are now within my

reach and is a reality. But what truly impacted me positively of being a nurse here in Singapore was the realisation of how the government prioritises the well-being of its people. It is no wonder that the quality of life in Singapore is regarded as high. I myself have seen it, experienced it and lived it, both at the professional and personal level.

From a citizen of another country working as a nurse and living as an expatriate in Singapore, I could only wish that every country in the world has the same modern and advanced healthcare system. It does not only make it easy for healthcare professionals like myself to fulfill our mission and duty, but it also ensures a harmonious and decent society where life is really valued and cherished.

Reflection by: Ms. Imelda C. Roxas, Assistant Nurse Clinician

Nursing is a Work of Heart

It is true what they say; nursing is a work of heart. As hard as it is, I still love my profession after so many years. The smiles I get from my patients never fail to fill my heart with joy as I know I've done my job well.

It has been a year since I left my country to work here in Singapore. It is not easy to leave my family, especially my son, but I have to as I'm doing this for their future. Moreover, I pursued to practise my nursing profession here because I know it can help me to grow in my career. When I left the Philippines in 2020, the pandemic was already in full swing, with strict lockdowns and quarantines. Everyone was scared, panicked, devastated and hungry. Hospitals were full, healthcare workers were exhausted, and some did not make it. Families of Covid-19 patients felt helpless. It was so painful to see the dead bodies of Covid-19 patients buried or cremated without their loved ones. Back in the Philippines and now here in Singapore, I am constantly worried about my family and friends, and I always pray for their safety and wellbeing.

I arrived in Singapore three days before Christmas and stayed in quarantine for two weeks. I spent my Christmas and New Year's alone - what made it more difficult is that it was my first ever Christmas away from my family. In my first months here, I remember crying alone as I missed my family so much. I was scared as I didn't know anyone here, and the thoughts of going back home to be with my family lingered. My only consolation was that I get to check on them daily with the convenience of the internet. As time goes by, I slowly adapted to my new environment and made new friends. They helped me keep my sanity intact when I felt homesick.

I know working miles away from home is a big challenge for nurses, especially with the ongoing pandemic. But I feel that as a nurse, I should aim to be a model for other people and remain strong in times of difficulties. What we are facing now is unprecedented, and I just hope and pray that everything will go back to normal soon. In our own small ways, such as following the health protocols and assuring a safe and clean environment for everyone, we can help alleviate the burden of this pandemic. When the time comes that everything goes back to normal and restrictions in all borders across the globe are lifted, I will surely fly back home as soon as I can to reunite with those I miss so dearly, especially my son.

Reflection by: Michelle Louise Garcia, Enrolled Nurse II

I Will Never Forget the Kindness Shown to Me

In 2007, I was lucky to be offered a scholarship to study for a Diploma in Nursing in Ngee Ann Polytechnic, and I have lived in Singapore since. Between then and now, I have always gone back to Myanmar twice or three times every year to visit my parents whom I miss very much. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have not been able to go back to visit them with the closing of international borders.

In June 2021, the number of cases of Covid-19 infections had increased tremendously in Myanmar. It was especially bad in Yangon, a city in Myanmar where my family resides. Citizens in Myanmar were deprived of even basic medical care with many hospitals closing down. Even simple medications like paracetamol and vitamin tablets were out of stock across all pharmacies. The remaining hospitals that were open only accepted individuals that had less than 50% oxygen saturation to be admitted as patients, and even then, not all got accepted. Banks were closed and people had to start queuing to use the ATM machines from dawn. Many had lost their jobs and the means to support their family. Almost every household was struggling to get through those desperate times. Many people lost their loved ones to Covid-19. I got very worried for my friends and family back home.

My fears came to pass in July 2021 when I received a phone call from my uncle saying that my mother had contracted the Covid-19 virus and started to exhibit the symptoms. Soon, my father was also infected. I was devastated. During that trying period, I wished my parents and everyone who contracted Covid-19 had medical facilities like we do in Singapore. I was able to survive this desperate time with the help of many friends who helped me in different ways. I will never forget the kindness of my friend who helped me to send medical supplies and food to my family. With the help of these friends in Yangon and Singapore, I pulled through without failing my duty as a nurse in Singapore.

Here in Singapore, in this long battle against the virus, I had also gone to the migrant workers' dormitories as part of a voluntary medical team to take care of rising positive cases. It did not scare me at all since I knew I would be safe as long as I follow infection control practices.

Covid-19 has changed a lot of my perspectives towards life. We cannot fight a pandemic as individuals - it takes the entire community. It also taught me to value my loved ones and be kinder to everyone.

Reflection by: Ms. Mya Thandar, Senior Staff Nurse I

Compassion and Kindness Prevails

The pandemic has been a lonely and meaningful ride for many in the last two years. A lot of people got sick, lost their lives, lost businesses, lost jobs, lost the opportunity to visit and be with their family...

At the start of the pandemic, I felt fearful when I first learnt about the travel restrictions. It was evident that I would not be able to see and be with my family anytime soon. Will my family be spared the virus? Will I get it? When will I be able to reunite with my loved ones? A lot of questions with no answers came into my mind and it pained me.

I knew that I needed to face and deal with the uncertainties. I chose to be strong mentally and emotionally, and remain hopeful that this pandemic will pass.

It is ironic that something good came out of the pandemic. It made me realise that I can choose to find purpose in the struggles that I have endured. I am more appreciative and count the blessings that I received no matter how small or big. I look for the good in every situation - I have food to eat, a roof under my head and a job to sustain my needs and I am in good health. There are so many people in the world worse off than what I have been going through just to live their lives on a daily basis. I have no reason to complain and not to be grateful.

I made a conscious effort to make more time for those who matter to me the most. My day will never be complete without video calls with my family. Living in a digitally advanced world is great as it is easy to stay connected while being physically apart from my loved ones.

Other things that I do is to always make time for myself as it is equally important. Doing what I love like spending time watching movies on Netflix and Filipino television shows makes me feel at home. Sometimes taking a walk in nature and visiting new cafes are also relaxing and help to reduce stress. It is also very helpful that I found a support network of friends who I trust to speak and share openly without fear of being judged.

Months have passed and it was on 4 October 2021 to be exact when we received the good news shared by Chief Nurse, Ms. Margaret Lee and the HR team about the NUHS SHN support package scheme. My heart was overflowing with joy that finally we will have the chance to see our family back home. I'm so grateful to all the senior leaders for making this happen. This is a very clear sign that even in the midst of the pandemic, compassion and kindness towards people still prevails in the organisation.

While I'm writing this reflection, I'm serving my last day of quarantine in the Philippines and looking forward to give my family the bear hugs and kisses we've missed. Finally, I'm home!

Reflection by: Ms. Mylene Virtudazo Malinao, Nurse Manager I

This Too Shall Pass

Being a nurse is a calling and I am so glad I answered that call.

When I was young, I always dreamt about being a nurse; I feel that I would be able to make a difference in each patient's life, it might be as small as getting a wheelchair if they seem weak or flaccid, a blanket if they feel cold, or even proffer a warm drink. Knowing that a nurse's voice, touch, care, and time can help a patient make it through a difficult night is one of the most rewarding feelings for me.

Like many other nurses, I have thought about quitting this profession because of how demanding it is – imagine being present at birth and death, and also dealing with people who aren't having the best day of their lives. My passion for nursing is the one thing that sustains me through my past 10 years on the job.

As the years passed, I made a decision to pursue my dreams in Singapore. I was in tears when I boarded the plane; tears of joy, sadness, and fear. Although Singapore is just a three-hour flight from the Philippines, the thought of living on my own and away from my family for the first time was scary. However, this did not stop me from chasing my dream as a nurse; instead, I was determined to fly high even when I'm away from my comfort zone.

Working as a foreign nurse, dealing with different cultures, languages, and adversity each day was very different from what I was used to but I was incredibly lucky for being part of one of the highly reputable hospitals in Singapore. I could not be more thankful for having this privilege.

After almost a year in Singapore, the Covid-19 pandemic completely transformed our world and our country. It severely affected everyone's lives because of its sudden onset and highly contagious nature. Just like the rest of the world, it reinforced onto me to fuel my passion and remain resilient.

When I look in the mirror and see the marks on my face and on the faces of my colleagues after wearing masks all throughout our shift, I wonder how much longer this situation will continue. It may be extremely unpredictable but we're hoping and praying that this too shall pass.

Reflection by: Ms. Olivarez Jaymie Garcia, Staff Nurse II

The Challenges Were Preparation for A Bigger Role

Throughout my journey as a nursing student in the Philippines, my professors often say that Nursing is 90% care and 10% job. I would then always ask myself, "Why?". I grew up knowing that being a nurse is a well-paying job with good overseas employment prospects. When I started my attachments and exposure to hospitals during clinical hours, I saw how a nurse should have the heart for the sick. I got my answer – nursing is not just a job but a passion that would make you care for people whom you've never met before.

Compassion is not found in nursing textbooks and can only be learned once a nurse finds his or her dedication to this chosen path; being with a patient on their sick bed and comforting not just them but their family as well; holding the hands of your sick patient while trying to encourage them and reassure that they will get better; establishing trust and nurse-patient relationships, addressing their concerns, and making sure that they understand their treatment regime will never be easy and would always require patience.

It is ironic because most of us nurses can take care of other people but have limited time to take care of ourselves and our own family. Spending hours in the hospital can be very exhausting. It is truly a tough job and it challenges you physically and mentally so being strong is a requirement to ace this profession.

I came to Singapore in 2019 at the age of 22. I left my family in the Philippines and started my journey here alone with hopes of helping my parents with my brother's education. I was accepted as an Enrolled Nurse, a change from my last position as a Staff Nurse in my home country due to lack of hospital experience. I started from scratch and learned everything anew. I knew my job would be different when I first stepped into this country and there were many challenges such as the communication barrier, culture differences, and ward routines. Still, I chose to persevere. On some days, I would feel like I'm too slow and not good enough. I felt like a burden to my colleagues because I'm still new and learning, but I realised that it is all part of the process and it's up to me to adapt.

The thought of going back to the Philippines for vacation kept me motivated, but then the Covid-19 pandemic started in early 2020 and flights were cancelled. I was homesick and worried for my family. I felt like I was losing my motivation and inspiration but again, I chose to persevere.

There was the time that our ward was converted to a Covid-19 ward for about three months. Covid-19 cases were increasing rapidly which made it scary being on the frontline. Thankfully our institution was well-prepared to provide us with complete protective equipment. I consider myself blessed when I wake up each day knowing that my family and I are healthy and Covid-free.

After a year and five months of being an enrolled nurse, I was given a chance to take on a case with the supervision of a Staff Nurse which helped me divert my attention away from the negativity of Covid-19. It was a great learning process. My colleagues and ward managers were so supportive and I felt really appreciative to be in this position and fulfilling one of my dreams when I was still starting my career in the Philippines.

My colleagues, especially the foreigners, were a great source of inspiration for me during this challenging time. I was inspired by how they stayed strong despite not being able to see and visit their kids during this prolonged pandemic.

Some things in life happen in ways you would never expect but I hope you would choose to hold on and persevere, just like I did. After two years in Singapore, I am now a Registered Nurse. All the challenges I have mentioned earlier were indeed preparation for a bigger role. Nursing is lifelong learning and we learn continuously to improve and be better.

Reflection by: Ms. Parone Lei Airra Magluyan, Staff Nurse II

Modern-Day Heroes

The Philippines is one of the top countries to have the most number of labour migrants referred to as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). OFWs are hailed as modern-day heroes by the government through remittance, which aid the economy and support their families. I am one of them. Just like most OFWs, my reasons for leaving my hometown are for better career opportunities and higher salaries and benefits. Singapore is the country that gave me this opportunity – to expand my knowledge and skills in my field of work and to provide financial support to my family and even build savings of my own.

Staying and working here has become even more of a blessing when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world. I have a stable job that demanded more from me while others lost theirs. This has been deeply felt in my hometown, where the economy dipped further to the bottom and caused closures of companies which led to unemployment of thousands of Filipinos, including my family and relatives.

In the Philippines, the numbers of infected and dying kept increasing day-by-day with limited resources to diagnose and treat the people, and to limit the spread of infection. I have been worried every second of every day since the pandemic began, especially for my elderly parents who have comorbidities. Honestly, I wanted to go home and take good care of them but restrictions were strictly implemented. All I can do is stay here, keep working, and try to keep in touch with them through calls and chats. Luckily, my siblings are taking care of them when I am far away. It is one of the things that keeps my mind at ease.

I have been physically, emotionally, and mentally drained by this pandemic but I am thankful for my support system here in Singapore. We found hobbies on our days off to keep our minds off from the stressful events that are happening. We try to keep ourselves in good physical and mental health.

I would immediately go home and see my family once travel restrictions are lifted. It has already been two years since I was able to spend time and bond with them. Vacation in my hometown with my family and the resolution of this pandemic will definitely offer rest and peace for my mind and body.

*Reflection by: Ms. Sotelo Anamie Malaca,
Senior Staff Nurse II*



Step Out of Your Comfort Zone

Time flies, I can't believe that I have been working in Singapore for two years now. I still remember how excited I was and how much I looked forward to work as a nurse in a foreign country, because my childhood dream was finally coming true.

I even created a to-do list for my time in Singapore, with goals such as making local friends, traveling around the world, studying a new language... However, plans can't keep up with changes; Covid-19 happened and I have been stuck in limbo until recently.

The pandemic has been a big challenge for me as a foreigner starting a new career. Due to the culture shock, language barrier, and lifestyle changes, I have shed many tears over the past two years. Thankfully, my colleagues offered a lot of support and encouragement to improve my quality of life here. I eventually also enrolled for English language lessons and persisted in exercising three times a week to de-stress. Through these efforts, I managed to find a balance between work and life in a new country.

At the same time, I also discovered some new insights for my career path. The longer I work in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), where I am currently based, the more that I realised it was not a sustainable career path for me. Thus, I decided to discuss my concerns and future options with my Reporting Officer (RO). I was pleasantly surprised that my RO was understanding and respected my decision to explore a transfer to another department. The transfer application and interview were successful, and I will be embarking on a new journey next year. I still feel a little uncertain about this new direction, but I choose to embrace my decision!

I'm thankful to Alexandra Hospital for giving me a second chance to advance in my career.

I'm thankful to myself for being strong and brave to step out of my comfort zone and for never giving up.

I'm thankful for all the ups and downs over the past two years.

I'm thankful for all the wonderful people I met here in Singapore.

Lastly, I'm thankful for all the experiences that made me who I am today.

Reflection by: Ms. Cheng Wan Ling, Staff Nurse I





Nurses at Work & Play





Chapter 4

Where There Are Bees There Are Flowers: Mental Health

And wherever there are flowers, there is new life and hope. Alex nurses may have felt the sting on their mental wellbeing after the world events of the past couple of years, but their strength and conviction have also harvested the sweetest honey to sustain their faith in nursing.



Image courtesy of Mr. Melvin Poon, Head of Allied Health at AH.

Nurses Never Stop Caring

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way people behave and communicate. Due to physical isolation, it necessitated the use of technology to connect with loved ones from various parts of the world. I have personally witnessed how a small tool can positively impact the mental wellbeing of patients with dementia.

It was another day in ward, where no visitors were allowed due to the rising Covid-19 infections in the community. I started my work at 2pm and observed that my dementia patients were looking bored and sleepy in their beds and chairs. Their loved ones would usually visit them in the afternoon to keep them occupied, making the place lively, but this situation has changed. They were not motivated when I tried engaging them.

A patient's son called me to ask about his father's well-being. On the spur of the moment, I asked if he would like to have a Zoom session with his father, which he readily agreed to. The Zoom session opened at 3pm with many family members joining in. The patient was very excited the moment he saw his wife, sons, daughters, and grandchildren on the screen. A big smile was beaming on his face and he was calling out their names one by name. He was so energetic and joyful to meet his loved ones over Zoom, updating them on how he was doing in the ward.

At 4pm, I set up another Zoom session for another patient and his family. Though he had trouble focusing on the screen initially, he slowly started engaging with his loved ones and soon laughter filled the room.

I felt comforted that I was able to help my patients feel less isolated in the ward by initiating the Zoom sessions and connecting them with their loved ones. Although it may seem like additional work for me to set up and liaise with families, I know that the interaction meant a lot for them. This experience has changed my values that one does not need to be present physically, and digital interaction is sufficient to assure both patients with dementia and their loved ones.

It was a positive experience as my patients looked happier, less lethargic and more motivated to interact with the nurses after their Zoom session. I was glad that I did not intervene with the second patient's Zoom session despite noticing that he was not able to follow the conversation initially. I respected his autonomy and space to speak during the supervised session and his family was thereafter able to engage him more effectively.

The common stereotype that older adults are reluctant to embrace the use of technology is a myth. Older adults with dementia (early stage) were observed to be as receptive and motivated as healthy older adults to the use of technology. The socio-emotional selectivity theory by Carstensen (1995) enabled me to understand my patients' motivation and attitude. This theory proposed that one's motivation for seeking socio-emotional support changes with increasing age, where older adults seek most emotional satisfaction interacting with their close friends and family members (Carstensen,1995). This explains why my patients were keen to use Zoom, and were feeling fulfilled after their session with family.

This experience gave me greater confidence to pro-actively ask families if they want Zoom sessions as family members are sometimes shy and unaware of this existing service in the ward. While the visitation restrictions were in place to rightfully protect our seniors from Covid-19 infections, we should not overlook their mental health during this period. Being a nurse, I play an essential role as I not only look after their physical health, I also act as a bridge of communication for my patients and their family.

In the future, I should always empathise with my patients by looking from their perspective to explore their needs. I also have to constantly remind myself that I should care for my patient as a person and not just a disease process. In conclusion, a small inconvenience to myself may bring more positive outcomes for my patients and their families.

Reflection by: Ms. Ang Wan Yi, Senior Staff Nurse II

Practising Self-Awareness to Understand Myself

Being away from home and working far away from family can be very challenging and tough for some of us. Some just get used to it, though there will be times when the cup is getting too full, and the combination of everything that is happening around us can make us feel like we're drowning and or just want to burst.

Mental health is about how we think, feel and act as we cope with our lives. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. It is important to take charge of our mental health and learn how to build our mental resilience and manage life's ups and downs. After all, being mentally and emotionally healthy is much more than just being free of depression, anxiety or other psychological issues, it also refers to the presence of positive characteristics.

I have been away from home for more than six years because of work, and it's been three years since my last visit. Though I miss home so much, I am just thankful for having my job here helping me and my family during this challenging time, and I am patiently waiting for a chance to be able to safely visit them.

I have learned that it is important to have self-awareness which is an essential component for positive mental health. Self-awareness is the ability to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of one's own character. It is like stepping back and observing your thoughts and feelings as they unfold. It can be as simple as noticing the emotions that you feel when you spend time with certain people or the thoughts that run through your head when you feel scared about trying something new.

I used to be confused with what I want in life. I have no idea what really keeps me going and what is the ultimate goal at the end of the line. Then I realised that the more I practise self-awareness, the more I understand myself. Having this awareness gives me the opportunity and the freedom to change things about myself, learning to better understand why I feel what I feel and why I behave in a particular way. I may not yet know my biggest goal in life, but while I take the time to find that out, at least I will be able to take good care of my mental health.

Reflection by: Ms. Ceniza Devie Fuenzalida, Enrolled Nurse I

Patients Are More Than Just Statistics

I became an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurse during the thick of the pandemic when Covid-19 struck our shores. During that time, we heard news of deaths from around the world, including Singapore, daily without batting an eyelid because it just felt like the new norm.

Mr T was one of the first few Covid-19 patients under my care in the ICU who was intubated. I nursed him before he was intubated and he had reached a point of hypoxia where he was confused and climbing out of bed. Thankfully, he was still lucid enough to attend Zoom sessions and speak to his family and his wife, who was also in another Covid-19 facility.

Our unit intubated him for a few days before we acknowledged that medically, we could not help him anymore. We switched gears to palliative care and prepared his family. Additionally, we encouraged long Zoom sessions where I would set a meeting room, donned up in the protective gear and held the iPad for his family to see and speak with him.

That was when it struck me the hardest. I realised the difference between reading about these events in the news and actually having to go through it with a patient's family – holding the iPad for them, hearing them say their goodbyes over the beeping cardiac monitor and ventilator.

During one of these sessions, in the midst of his family's conversation, a very loud cardiac alarm sounded; it was his flatline. Mr T had sadly passed on and thankfully his family was there to witness him take his last breath, and I was there to physically accompany him. It felt surreal as I was alone in the room. I remember not knowing what to say and muttered "my condolences" while I explained the situation to the family over Zoom.

It was heartbreaking knowing that the family will not be able to have a proper farewell and wake for him, nor could they see his body. I left work feeling dazed that day, and it did take a while before the grief came on behalf of Mr T and his family.

Watching the news and seeing the statistics on the number of Covid-19 patients and deaths daily did not bother me as much initially. It was only until I actually had to handle a Covid-19 patient and his death that it became so real to me. I realised the implications of every single digit reported daily as it affects not just the individual, but their family and friends. These are more than just numbers, but actual lives. I only wish for everlasting peace for Mr T.

Reflection by: Ms. Charmaine Bay, Senior Staff Nurse I

Creating Learning Opportunities in Challenging Situations

On 23 January 2020, Covid-19 hit Singapore. Since then, many things have changed, and many uncertainties have revolved around Covid-19. When the first case was detected in Singapore, I was a nursing student who was still quite naïve about its implications to the Singapore's healthcare system. As someone who was a toddler during the SARS period, I did not expect the extent of Covid-19 to be very extensive. When DORSCON Orange status was announced, I was having my two-week long clinical attachment. The attachment was then converted to being in school because of the change in DORSCON status. It was then that I realised the severity of Covid-19.

Fast forward to May 2021, I had joined Alexandra Hospital (AH) as a nurse. A few months into my new job, I was given the chance to join the team caring for patients with Covid-19. As someone new to the healthcare family, I felt excited and intrigued by that opportunity. Every day presented a new challenge which required for me to step out of my comfort zone to further improve myself and sharpen my clinical judgement. I relied on the guidance of my preceptors and colleagues regarding the constant updates of protocols and guidelines. I am grateful for their guidance and patience that allowed me to grasp this knowledge quickly.

There were many firsts that happened while caring for patients with Covid-19: my first patient that desaturated, and another patient who unfortunately passed on. These two instances were some of my many firsts which were the most significant. Feelings of being lost, nervous and anxious about what would happen next were present in both instances.

As I am writing this, I realised that I could have done several things differently. When my patient passed on, I experienced difficulty in breaking the news of his demise to his family. I was afraid that I might not sound respectful and compassionate enough and that the message which I relayed might sound confusing. Fortunately, and thankfully, the family members were very understanding and kind despite their loss. This was something which I truly appreciated.

After that incident, I went on to read up about the most appropriate way to communicate with family members. I learned more about dealing with grieving family members and hopefully, I will be able to transfer that theoretical knowledge into practice when a similar situation arises in future.

To me, nursing is all about creating learning opportunities in challenging situations. We should always find ways to consistently improve the care that we provide for our patients while ensuring that our well-being is taken care of. These past two years have not been easy but I am sure with our grit and dedication towards caring for our patients, we will be able to pull through to the other side.

Reflection by: Ms. Cheng Hin Kia, Staff Nurse I

Positivity Is My Choice

Having a positive outlook is a choice I make for myself each day. I am a better person when I am optimistic.

Being a nurse is a challenging occupation. At times, I question if I should give up, but I believe it is my calling to be a nurse and thinking positively keeps my spirits high. Working in a hectic environment makes my adrenaline rush and pushes me to work more effectively and efficiently.

I came to Alexandra Hospital from the private sector and I had a tough time during my probation as the hospital settings were totally different. The probation period strengthened me as a person and as a nurse. My struggle only lessened when my preceptor made time and effort to equip me with the skills and knowledge required to function as a nurse in the department. She demonstrated to me the ways to be professional and compassionate in caring towards my patients. Over the years, I learned how to be strong and resilient after dealing with different patients with various care needs and demands. My superiors are also amazing and fantastic because of their selfless leadership and guidance.

Being a positive person is less about who you are and more about who you are with. I believe positivity and negativity are highly contagious emotions. We all tend to become a mirror of the other people we are surrounded by. My secret of being a positive person is to smile, as it is the most powerful yet simplest thing you can do. Smiling is an easy and effective way to spread happiness all around.

On the contrary, negativity doesn't help at all. It is exhausting and makes me less resourceful. Negativity drains my energy and conceals the possibilities. Negativity is a poor choice for my life.

Today, I maintain a positive perspective. I will also choose to view the world from the perspective of positivity.

Reflection by: Ms. Euna Cabute Manzano, Senior Staff Nurse II

Keep Your Loved Ones Close

Deepavali 2021 meant a lot to me as I was able to bond with my family members, bake cookies at home and shop with my family for the festive season. It was a far cry from the situation in 2020, where I was discharged from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) only two days before Deepavali after suffering from Covid-19 for more than two weeks.

When Covid-19 struck Singapore in early 2020. I was working in another hospital and was tasked to care for asymptomatic Covid-19 patients who were recovering at a nearby hotel facility. I travelled to the south Indian city of Chennai in September 2020 with my daughter as we wanted to explore the possibility of my daughter continuing her studies overseas. We were both tested negative for Covid-19 on the return from Chennai in October; though we tested positive on the 13th day of our 14-day quarantine in a local hotel. I was very upset because it made me question whether we should have avoided travel in the first place. However, as a medical professional, I was not fearful of contracting the virus and was hopeful of recovery. Both my daughter and I were transferred to NCID for treatment.

My daughter was then discharged just three days before Deepavali followed by me. It was a huge relief for me to reunite with my son in time for Deepavali celebrations. We had gone through a roller coaster ride of emotions and, though the preparations fell slightly short, we were elated to be back together as a family to celebrate the occasion.

Living with Covid-19 soon became the norm for me and my family after recovering from the disease. In February 2021, I travelled to Europe with my daughter to settle the accommodation and administrative matters related to her medical undergraduate studies. In August, I joined Alexandra Hospital as a Senior Enrolled Nurse at its Integrated Care Clinic.

We all have our ups and downs in life and this is just one episode. Covid-19 has taught me to cherish and keep my loved ones close because you never know what could happen next.

Reflection by: Ms. Kavitha Govindarajoo, Senior Enrolled Nurse II

Organisational Culture is Crucial

Mental health and the wellbeing of nurses have never been a topic of discussion or focus in nursing. For the past 25 years in my nursing career, the perception is that nurses have to be strong emotionally, mentally and they must be tough enough to handle all kinds of situations. Mental health is for the people with mental illnesses.

The common adage among senior nurses goes, 'Nurses must be strong; nurses are not supposed to cry; we are supposed to put our patients and their families first and when patients are upset or angry, we have to bear with it. When nurses feel stress, they are not coping well and not able to prioritise with their work; something must be wrong with the nurse when they see a counsellor.'

In our daily work, nurses also feel guilty for taking a longer break during a long eight-hour shift. After a whole day of standing and walking to meet the various needs of the patients and their families, nurses are perceived to be lazy when they so much as take a seat.

The nursing workforce is changing. There is a multigenerational nursing workforce that comprise of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennial nurses. The workforce is also aging. Different groups of nurses have different needs and coping strategies to manage their daily work and stress. As senior nurses, we can no longer use our past experiences to mentor the younger nurses

Times have changed. The Covid-19 pandemic has raised the awareness of mental health and wellbeing. People are advocating for a good cause. It is no longer a taboo topic and organisations are championing it. It is a positive movement and it is no longer a shame to talk about and seek help openly.

However, we also have to look out for the possible negative aspects. With the increased awareness of promoting mental wellbeing, organisations have started to introduce initiatives such as yoga, pilates, mindfulness sessions, employee assistance programs and cognitive behavioral therapy. Interestingly, one expert shared that these positive effects are temporary. Sustained mental wellbeing may not be achieved and too many uncoordinated initiatives can add on mental stress for employees.

To me, the most important key is organisational culture. Manager support is crucial and line managers need to care for the wellbeing of staff. My recommendations would be to recruit or promote those with strong interpersonal skills; induct on organisation's approach and facilities; incentivise line managers to act as role models and encourage an open culture around mental health; include interpersonal skills as key training components and equip staff to look after their own health and wellbeing.

We do not have to wait for top leadership to give direction for us to look after the mental health and wellbeing of our employees. We as nursing leaders should act as role models and advocate for wellbeing in the daily course of work. Organisational culture is crucial.

Mental Health is as Important as Any Other Aspect of Health

Mental health is a positive concept related to the social and emotional well-being of individuals. Emotional and mental health is important because it is a vital part of our everyday life and impacts our thoughts, behaviours, and emotions.

Essentially, mental wellbeing for nurses is very important so that we can carry out our duties at our top form. Unfortunately, when Covid-19 hit us two years ago, our mental health was affected due to the many uncertainties. Many familiar routines have been disrupted. All of us felt anxious, not only for ourselves and our families but for our patients as well.

Due to the rise in Covid-19 cases, restrictions for ward visitors were implemented for a prolonged period. My colleagues and I never stopped looking for ways to help our ward patients connect with their families remotely, such as through video calls. I realised that the mental health of patients is as important as the mental health of nurses. Even when some nurses may be unknowingly struggling with their mental health, we continue to go the extra mile to ensure that patients' needs and wellbeing are taken care of.

There were times when the ward's energy will be low due to the rising cases of Covid-19 in Singapore and my foreign colleagues' home countries. Many of my colleagues, who have families in their hometown overseas, will be worried and anxious about what's to come. Work-wise, there were also many restrictions and changing protocols in place. How did we overcome it? Before every roll call, we will always be encouraging each other in the staff room that we can go through shifts together. Phrases such as "We can do it, guys!", "Let's do our best and go home on time today!", or even "Let's help one another! We can do it!" gave us the energy boost we all needed as a team. These tiny motivations did help us to mentally prepare for what's to come for the upcoming shift amidst the increasing anxiety levels when wearing full PPE.

The past two years of working in a hospital ward during the pandemic felt like a never-ending tunnel with no light in sight. However, I am thankful to be surrounded by wonderful colleagues turned friends who constantly offer support and encouragement to one another. On most mornings, one of my amazing colleagues will buy us some snacks to start the shift starts. It may seem like a small thing but it was the motivation that we all needed. Food truly brings people together!

Seeing a few of my colleagues in and out of Quarantine Order felt daunting, because we realised anything can happen. I will intermittently check up on those in quarantine to see whether they or their family may need anything. I strongly believe that we have to look out for one another, to ensure that the other person's emotional and mental needs are taken care of in a way.

Aside from my wonderful team, I also appreciated the support from the community and management of Alexandra Hospital. The care packs, food and snacks from them brought us all together. I recall the days where we received ice cream which cheered us all up. These acts of motivations reassure us that there is a big network of support for all the healthcare workers and we are all going through this pandemic together.

However, the one negative thing about the pandemic is definitely the feeling of isolation at work sometimes. We were not able to gather around to have our break time in a huge group as we used to do before Covid-19. I am looking forward to the day when we can do that again.

From this pandemic, I realised that mental health is as important as any other aspect of health. Many things can affect our mental health, such as having drastic changes in our lives at the most unexpected time. Hence, it is important to take care of our mental health and manage our work-life balance in order not to affect our life negatively.

Reflection by: Ms. Iffah Farzanah, Senior Staff Nurse I

Team Work Makes The Dream Work

Ever since Covid-19 hit the world, I have depended on the word 'Hope' to get by each day. Hoping that things will get better for everyone so that we can get together like we used to. Hoping that we stop living in fear and worry. Hoping that the travel ban will get lifted so that our fellow nurses can finally reunite with their families back in their hometowns. Hoping that our patients can live to see the next sunrise.

As a healthcare worker, I thought I would have gotten used to seeing deaths. But working as a front liner during this pandemic has truly been an eye opener. When the Delta variant emerged, I realised how lethal this strain of virus is. In the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) where I am based, we have nursed a few patients who were badly infected, and I will never forget their passing.

I remember the very day when a patient Mr. J came into our ward. He was an unvaccinated individual who came in with severe shortness of breath and requiring oxygen support. Memorably, Mr. J seemed to know that he will not be able to survive this episode. Before he was intubated, he made a desperate request to take the vaccine immediately, hoping that it will save him. Unfortunately, that was a request that we were not able to fulfill.

Over the next couple of weeks, the medical and nursing team fought very hard to keep Mr. J alive. I believe Mr. J had also fought valiantly in his own way to try to win this battle against Covid-19. Sadly, after close to three weeks, Mr. J. left us peacefully in October 2021.

After Mr. J's death, I was crippled by guilt and sadness for a period of time. What most people do not see about our job is the pain that overwhelms us each time a patient passes on. I recall this statement from my student days that was emphasised to us, "Never get too emotionally attached to your patients." I guess that was reinforced to us so that we do not get too consumed with our feelings as we care for our patients. Yet, I find myself struggling to draw the line between being just a nurse, and being their nurse. I think this is something that we, as individual nurses, have to figure out along the way.

Over the next couple of weeks after Mr. J's death, my unit dealt with a few more deaths of Covid-19 patients. And each death seemed to hit me a little harder each time. I guess what I have learnt throughout the pandemic is that life is so short. I think most of us mapped out our lives or make plans thinking that we have so

much time on hand. But Covid-19 made me realised that life can throw up many curveballs and do not always go according to plan. It has taught me to cherish life and the people around me a bit more. I also saw the need of a support system for nurses to rely on when it comes to processing grief, sadness and guilt.

Most importantly, I saw how strong our team was, including doctors, nurses and allied health colleagues. I fully appreciate the saying; team work makes the dream work. Without any of them, our management and care of the patients would not have been so smooth. It is going to be long way ahead out of this pandemic but I believe with all of us in this together, we can get through this.

Reflection by: Ms. Jasmine Ang, Staff Nurse I

Look After Yourself Before You Can Look After Others

As I wrote this in December 2021, another year has gone by living in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Life has changed tremendously for many of us, wearing a mask at all times is the norm and leisure traveling is a thing of the past. However, with the announcement of vaccinated travel lanes over the past few weeks, many of us are hopeful that we are able to travel again. For many nurses this news was a relief as many of us have not seen our families physically for almost 2 years. I could never imagine that Chinese New Year 2020 would be the last time I spent time with my family from Malaysia.

As I reflect on the past two years, there were times when it seems all dark clouds with no sign of the rainbow. Changes come from all around at the speed of lighting, learning to think on the feet, putting out fires and keeping sane were the orders of the days in this battle to contain Covid-19. Fearing of the unknown and changing policies have a way of slowly creeping up on our mental wellness.

At the beginning of the pandemic a lot of us was swamped with the constant and frequent changes in PPE policy, visitor management, screening and staff management policies. It was added stress while we were trying to make sure that the hospital is functioning to look after non Covid-19 patients. Adding on we also have housing issues for foreign nurses and those who travel daily across the Causeway to work. At home, I had to manage the segregation with my husband who is also a health care worker. We spoke to our children about the pandemic and what we needed from them so that they will stay safe and manage their mental wellness.

The level of stress can still be felt especially after a difficult day at work and going home to sort out the home-based learning issues for my twins who were in primary school. I could see that they had a difficult time coping with home-based learning too. Slowly, we all learned to cope with the situation at home and find a balance while ensuring we managed the stress level and keep everyone safe.

One day at work, while I was rounding in the wards, I encountered a Filipino colleague who was crying as her family back in the Philippines were not well. She was not alone; stories of loved ones getting sick and dying back home among foreign nurses and friends came at a steady pace even as we carry on our duties as frontline healthcare workers in Singapore.

My parents are both in Malaysia and during these two years I have experienced first-hand the anxiety and stress trying to look after them from across the causeway. The mental wellness of frontline workers was called out more and more as the situation worsened. It became clear that looking after yourself before you can look after others was truly important for mental wellbeing.

I do have my fair share of feeling stressed with severe shoulder pain. The pain could be extremely intense and sleepless nights haunted me. Before the pandemic I was doing exercise as a way to maintain my weight, however during this period exercise became a life saver as the one hour of daily physical activities helped me to find me-time away from the stress. Besides exercising, I also took up baking and it was really therapeutic to knead and whip up yummy bread and desserts.

As a family we also think of ways to bond together such as having movie nights, picnic by the Jacuzzi pool at home and reading together. Couple time is really important too, and we take time to appreciate each other and also have time away from the kids to bond as a couple.

I am coping but still worried about my family in Malaysia. This is perhaps the longest time I have been physically apart from my mother, yet there is still no definite timeline of when I can be with my overseas family again. There will always be tension and stress at work, but good support and teamwork from bosses to juniors help make it bearable and most importantly, help me find the joy at work. The pandemic has shown me that a caring work culture is really important for keeping the morale up.

No matter what 2022 brings, life goes on; nurses are still pushing to provide good care to our patients. We may be exhausted, missing our families badly, and looking for better work life balance solutions; the grit is there to carry on to nurse as we are in here because of a higher calling and not the glamour of the job.

*“Life is unpredictable,
It changes with the seasons,
Even your coldest winter,
Happens for the best of reasons,
And though it feels eternal,
Like all you’ll ever do is freeze,
I promise spring is coming,
And with it, brand new leaves.”*
~e.h.

Reflection by: Ms. Keren Heng, Assistant Director of Nursing

Patients' Psychological Well-Being Should Not Be Neglected

My nursing journey started in University. Fresh out from the Army, I went through nursing school with an open and curious mind. The few years in school gave me an important introduction into what nurses do. Finally, graduation came - equipped with the basic nursing knowledge, it was time for me to put them into practice.

Still, I was very much clueless as to which path I was going to take. With the different types of hospitals catering to diverse patient profiles all over the island, nurses' roles are specific yet widely ranged at the same time. On a job search website, a recruiter chanced upon my resume and offered me a chance to work in Alexandra Hospital (AH). Prior to this, AH had not cross my mind as a place for work as I live quite a distance away. However, having heard of the good experiences and stories from friends and families, I wanted to find out more about the hospital. During the job interview, I was impressed by the care model AH has adopted and its future plans for expansion. I decided that this is the place where I would like to start my nursing career.

At AH, I was tasked to the General Medicine and Rehabilitation wards. With good support from colleagues and supervisors, working here is never a dull experience. It is also a great place to build my foundation as a nurse. During the Covid-19 pandemic, I was given the opportunity to work in the Covid-19 wards and Community Care Facilities. It was definitely an eye-opener for me, being exposed to the different areas of care.

The pandemic made me pause to reflect on my experience over the past few years. Though I have cared for patients, I have been solely focused on their medical conditions. I realised I have neglected their emotional health. Though it is not the nurses' responsibility or part of our employment contract; as a service-oriented profession, I feel that it is an important aspect that nurses should not disregard.

Mention the word health, and most of us would think of having a body with no physical ailments and functioning body systems. The mental well-being of a person is usually not taken into account. Having some experience caring for patients in the ward, I realised that most of my attention is on the physical aspect of the patient, trying to treat their medical conditions. Sometimes, the patient may have mental health issues which I am not able to understand, therefore not being able to provide the best care.

I am glad that I pursued this area and have been given the opportunity to further my interest in mental health nursing. During my clinical attachment in the mental health hospital, I am exposed to patients with different types of mental health issues. The care for each of these conditions varies and it is important to be able to identify and differentiate between them.

I got to see the care provided to these mental health patients throughout their hospitalisation. From the day they are admitted to discharge, noticeable changes can be observed in their behavior and mood. The effects of medications as well as the electroconvulsive therapy helps to suppress and improve their condition.

Though only a minority of patients in the medical setting has mental issues, their psychological well-being should not be neglected. Some patients may feel depressed or easily agitated due to their medical conditions. This is where having the knowledge in taking care of the psychological well-being of a person would be useful. It also enables me to look out for signs of mental issues from their behavior.

I hope that upon completion of the mental health nursing course, I will be able to provide more holistic care for patients, treating their medical conditions while also helping them to keep a positive outlook on recovery.

Reflection by: Ms. Lim Yu Xuan, Senior Staff Nurse II

Letter to A Patient in Heaven

Today, on the 27th of October 2021, I reached the ward and started my shift as per normal. With a start, I saw that the blue barrier and trolley in front of your room were cleared. My heart jumped for a second and I asked myself why you would be transferred to another hospital.

I walked towards the pantry and when I passed by your room, I saw that you were already in a mortuary shroud with your face a little sunken and the redness at the tip of your nose covered with a dressing. I felt a surge of sadness inside me; you have gone and you brought a piece of me away with you without you ever knowing it.

I have always prayed that you would get better and would someday discharge from Intensive Care Unit (ICU). All of us in the ICU medical team have tried our best and worked hard to ensure your road to recovery, but my prayer was denied, you were taken away and I am sure you are in a better place. By now, you would have seen the rainbow of heavens where you can enjoy so much more compared to our mortal world.

You succumbed to this virus called Covid-19. When you were alive, your family was forbidden to visit you in order to prevent the spread of the virus. It was so hard for me to see you breathing with the aid of the ventilator and lying prone, from outside the room.

You would know how hard it has been since Covid-19 reached our shores about two years ago. Life have never been the same for me. Working in a hospital, I am afraid of passing any virus to my loved ones so I have stopped visiting with them. Actually, I have just stopped going out as I do not want to get infected nor would I want to infect others. You see, I have become an anti-social individual.

I have an aging parent and two helpers. Each day when I come back from work, I would head for a shower immediately although I had a shower before I left work. I may have become paranoid. Every day at work there are no meals together with my team mates; I wear the N95 mask at all times except when I am commuting back home in a surgical mask; I must always remember to keep a safe distance from my colleagues when we are gathered for discussions; when I nurse a patient with the type of virus similar to yours, I would need to wear a head cover, a goggle, a gown and a pair of gloves to armour myself. When an alarm sounds inside a patient's room due to their desaturation, I want to quickly enter the room to help but I have to put on the full PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) – you see, it's frustrating and time-consuming but it is necessary, and I just try my best.

I have always believed there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Now that you are in heaven with God, please pray for us that we will be spared from the virus and that this virus that has caused so much misery, sadness and longing will soon be gone. I hope we will meet again one day, perhaps in heaven. Goodbye for now as I have to continue my daily routines to save the other patients.

Reflection by: Ms. Rahmah Bte Mohamed, Assistant Nurse Clinician

We Will Overcome

Nurses' mental health have most definitely been affected by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Studies suggest that nurses working in such crises may suffer from a deterioration in mental health that can last for years after the initial outbreak (Goh et al., 2020). It is important for a nurse to have the optimal mental health as it has been proven countless times that a nurse's mental health has an impact on the work process outcomes (Vasconcelos et al., 2016). Furthermore, care quality and staff productivity are affected when employees are under stress which results in high absenteeism rates. Due to the high absenteeism rate, more nurses are required to work extra days and longer hours. This causes increased stress, perpetuating the cycle of deteriorating mental health in all nurses. (Parrish & Allred, 1995).

Things have been extremely difficult for the past two years. I was finishing university when there was a spike in Covid-19 cases, and I joined the Alexandra Hospital (AH) family while Covid-19 was still widespread. The transition was difficult as many extra precautions had to be taken. On my first day in AH, I encountered a staff member who was Covid-19 positive, which scared me. I was less concerned about my own health and more concerned about transmitting the disease to my younger brother and my father, who has several underlying medical conditions.

At the start, I had no idea what was going to happen because I was new to this environment and still unsure of protocols. We were then put under lockdown. Those two weeks of lockdown were exhausting, both physically and mentally. I didn't know anyone and was left feeling lonely and lost. It gradually became the routine for us nurses to put on our personal protective equipment (PPE) and then proceed to start work as if nothing had happened. I quickly began to notice that some of my co-workers had been issued with quarantine orders (QO) and were not present in the clinical area. Many thoughts raced through my mind, wondering if they were okay and how frightening it must have felt to have to be under QO and isolated from everyone else.

When it comes to how Covid-19 has affected interactions with other staff members, I would say there isn't much of a difference during work because we all must still work together as a team to provide our patients with the best care possible. However, on a personal level, it is truly unfortunate that we cannot sit together as a group and enjoy a meal or two during break time with our masks off and unwind after a long and exhausting shift. As someone new, it was challenging for me to get to know my colleagues. With time, I was able to get to know them and gradually ended up knowing them better and formed friendships.

The most essential takeaway message for me though all these is that life is precious and that anything can happen at any time. It taught me to appreciate the times I spent with my father and brother during the lockdown. Life decelerated for me during the lockdown, and it forced me to consider issues that I had previously ignored. Even if it was only for a short time, I concentrated on my mental health. Workwise, I have learned the importance of the constant adaptation that nurses must undergo. It was difficult, but I am so proud of myself for the progress I have made along the way.

Due to the pandemic, more people have started cherishing their health and time spent with their family and friends. Furthermore, they begin to show more recognition to the frontliners fighting in the Covid-19 warzone. People have come together as one nation to help keep Singapore safe, and sooner or later, we will all have overcome the difficult and emotionally draining pandemic.

Reflection by: Ms. Shalini D/O Ganesan, Staff Nurse I

The Faces I Wear

Our faces are one of the important features of ourselves that makes a difference in the lives of people we meet every day. All of us are wonderfully and uniquely made. Although our faces are fixed in a certain way, it is greatly affected by emotions which changes the way we look in an instant.

Sometimes, our faces may not always exactly display who we are or what we are truly feeling. I call it a face mask; the face that I choose to “wear” or show in a situation that is contrary to what I believe, and the emotions I’m feeling. And almost every day I wear different kinds of mask at work.

I have been in the healthcare industry for 14 years. Every day I am faced with uncertainty, especially when nursing critically ill patients. I learned how important a face mask is. Many a time I am caught in a situation wherein I must show a face that may not exactly tell how I feel, but is what is needed in the given situation.

We deal with our patients professionally when we look after them. But being a nurse to a patient and being yourself can be divided by a very thin line at times. Take for example when I care for an elderly demented patient who is agitated. Instead of showing frustration, my face changes the moment I step in the patient’s room. I immediately smile to put them at ease and speak to them in a manner that they would like; no matter how exhausting that can be.

There was a time I had to send a critically ill and ventilated patient back home because of his wish to pass on in his home. This was something new to me because I have never sent someone that critically ill home. I felt immense pressure to ensure that he has a safe journey home. But when I saw the face of his loving and anxious wife looking at her dying husband, I put on a mask of confidence despite the worries at the back of my mind. I simply must make a switch because his wife was relying on me.

A patient once asked me what are his chances of surviving his deteriorating condition. Although I fully understand how uncertain things might turn out. I assured the patient that he is well taken care of, and that the medical team is doing the best they can to manage his condition. I do the same for the relatives of the patients who come and visit their loved ones. Sometimes they share stories with me about the patient and their lives together. They get very emotional and cry while I have to remain composed, acknowledge their sorrow and calm them.

When I respond to a sudden deterioration of patient, I try to show my colleagues that together with the practitioners we will be able to manage the situation. My colleagues need assurance that things are under control, so I have to put on another mask of reassurance and hope even though I may also feel stressed.

If the deterioration leads to death, my spirit breaks and I mourn for the patient, because I create bonds with my patients, especially if the care was extensive. But no matter how affected I am, I move on and always get ready to come to work the next day and make sure that I do my best.

These are just the many faces affected by emotions that I carry each day at work. This is what makes me grow as person – I learned that sometimes it is better to put on a mask and get on with my job, rather than let my real emotions get in the way.

Reflection by: Ms.Suzette Rubiales, Assistant Nurse Clinician

Entering the Profession Right in the Thick of the Pandemic

It is common knowledge in the nursing industry that nurses encounter a high level of stress continuously throughout each shift due to the long working hours and professional dissatisfaction. This work-related stress will also negatively impact nurses' professionalism, quality of care, competency and overall quality of life. This all leads to the majority of the nurses being burnt out which indirectly affects their mental health. When nurses' mental health is affected, their well-being will also be affected.

Nurses' mental health and well-being have been strenuously tested in the past two years of the pandemic. As a fresh graduate from university entering the profession right in the thick of the pandemic, it was tough for me to adapt to the frequent changes in protocols and routines in the hospital due to the evolving situation. I recall how in May 2021, a colleague tested positive for Covid-19. That ignited an entire chain of testing and quarantine among those in her team and their close contacts, including me. Though my test came back negative. I still felt lost and frightened, and did not wish to unknowingly pass the virus to my family members.

Then, there was a shortage of manpower as some colleagues were under quarantine. But our daily routine could not be put to a halt as our profession is to provide holistic care for our patients 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. To continue the care for our patients, we had to adhere to the new protocols, one of which was the donning of personal protective equipment (PPE), consisting of a face shield, a cap, eye goggles, N95 mask, fluid-resistant gown and gloves. We had to wear the PPE over our scrubs whenever we enter the ward, which often meant the start of our shift to the end. Throughout the whole shift, we felt extremely humid due to it being very hard to breathe with the N95 mask. We also had to manage miscommunications as it was difficult to speak and hear well with the PPE on.

After the lockdown, 'normal' activities resumed and the cycle of new protocols began again. My colleagues were still in and out of quarantine. I saw how exhausted my colleagues were during this period; but I also saw their perseverance. From a perspective of a newbie, I honestly felt that we managed to overcome this tough period due to the strong bonds between our colleagues as well as our bosses who played a huge role during the lockdown. They gave us continuous guidance and clear instructions. I was amazed by their professionalism and calmness during the lockdown.

Despite all these new routines, challenges and protocols that I have to learn and abide by, I am grateful for my colleagues for taking the time and effort to explain and teach me when they are so busy with their own tasks. Because of them, I learned the importance of teamwork and time management. I know now if I ever face such challenges again, I will be able to handle them efficiently.

Reflection by: Ms. Tricia Chng, Staff Nurse I

Learning to Celebrate the Small Wins in Life

Covid-19 has hit so many of us in different ways since it started terrorising all of our lives two years ago. From being fearful to forceful acceptance and now, trying to cope with it as we continue on with our lives. I have to say these past two years have not been easy at all. As a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), I have seen how my colleagues had to put patients first instead of themselves. Many of us have been away from home, trying to fight alongside all the other healthcare workers in hopes of coping with the surge and eventually be able to reunite with our beloved families. There have been tears and laughter throughout this bittersweet period. For this reflection, I would like to share about a memorable patient that I have cared for recently.

Mdm T, was an 80-year-old Chinese lady with no significant past medical history. She came into our ICU due to desaturation in the general ward, from a Covid-19 infection. She was a vaccinated individual but unfortunately, she was one of the few who seemed to be suffering from a much more serious disease progression than other vaccinated patients. Her condition just seemed to worsen every single day. She was getting increasingly breathless and required more oxygen support as the days passed. A simple task such as holding a cup of water will make her saturation reading plunge drastically. Even though her family was clear that they did not want Mdm T to be in any kind of pain or suffering, they were initially very reluctant to hold any conversations about end-of-life care. They found it really difficult to accept that their beloved mother/wife's days are numbered. But as the days passed, they realised that Mdm T was not going to get any better.

Mdm T, was a very warm and lovely lady. Although she was sick and feeling uncomfortable, she chose to be there for people who cared for her. There was an incident that I could remember very vividly. Mdm T had just finished her lunch, when her husband visited with a bowl of Bak Kut Teh noodles he had personally prepared for her. Despite having had a full lunch, Mdm T happily tucked into the noodles. I was very surprised yet puzzled, so I asked her about it when I got some alone time with her. She told me, "Yes, I was very full after eating the hospital food. But my husband has never cooked anything at home prior to my hospital admission. If I didn't eat his noodles, he will feel sad and I don't want him to feel that way." This is all coming from a patient who is unwell and weak.

At that very moment, I realised that even though most people might think that her family is taking care of her by visiting with home-cooked meals, Mdm T is also reciprocating the care in her own way; making sure her husband feels appreciated by eating the food that he has prepared. And that reminded me to always see things from different perspectives; love comes in many ways and forms.

Unfortunately, shortly after this incident, Mdm T deteriorated drastically in a span of a few days. That morning before her demise, her family was with her the entire night and they were right beside her as she took her last breath. Death is still something that we, as nurses, struggle with, but in this particular case, I felt relieved to know that she was well-loved by her family members and I am sure she felt that too. It was a relief for both her family and myself that she was no longer in pain or suffering.

I do not know what lies ahead in the future. But I am starting to accept this new norm of living with Covid-19. Accept that the workflow and restrictions will change any time to adapt to the situation, and accept that our patients will come and go. I am also learning to be thankful for the technology that enables me to stay connected with my loved ones back at home. It has been a challenging two years in battle with this virus. But within these two years, I have gained new friends, found new hobbies and bonded with my colleagues at work. This virus has been a ruthless one but it has taught how to appreciate the little things and celebrate the small wins in life.

Reflection by: Ms. Yee Kah Ke, Senior Staff Nurse I

Chapter 5

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: Future of Nursing

Florence Nightingale said, “Let us never consider ourselves finished nurses.” Nursing is a calling, a vocation which necessitates lifelong learning. Alex nurses ponder how they can work together to create their vision and realise their dreams for the future of nursing.



Searching for Meaning

I vividly remember when I was three years old, I would wear my boots and raincoat and stand under the pouring rain, while looking up to the sky and hoping that there would be a voice telling me where I came from and why I am here on this earth. Miracles did not happen, and there was no answer forthcoming from the sky. This quest of mine went on till I could no longer fit into my little boots. My parents were probably too busy to pay attention to this 'psychic' child who was searching for the meaning of life at such a young age.

As I grew up, this quest remained though it was buried deeper and deeper by a busy life. Many years later, I found my calling to be a nurse. Naturally the existential crisis in my DNA also propelled me to search for meaning in nursing during the many years of my career.

When I was a young nurse, I was intrigued with oncology and hematology knowledge and treatments, as well as nursing care, I was in awe of precision medicine that can help to cure cancer. Though science may seem splendid, promising, and hopeful; one common thing that I have observed is how humans search for meaning in the journey of cancer. Many have risen above the suffering of cancer and gave meaning to their sufferings.

I recall one of my patients' stories that has deepened my understanding on the meaning of life. This patient had very advanced cancer and only bone marrow transplant perhaps could prolong his survival. Due to his old age, he needed to endure prolonged hospitalisation, which included many trips to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) due to complications. This patient shared with me that his suffering was meant to contribute to an eventual cure. Despite all the discouragements and setbacks, he never gave up hope on medicine to cure him. I feel ashamed because many times I became doubtful but he encouraged me to look beyond the circumstances and always hold on to hope. The ultimate goal of achieving a cure became the primary motivation to enable him to have the strength and power to endure these sufferings.

I reflect on the meaning of many activities I perform as a nurse. Do I give meaning to them or merely perform them for the sake of completing them? I am glad that with reflective practices and perseverance, I have found the meaning of nursing for me. This discovery sustains me when I encounter challenges.

Nursing in the current era is exciting. With the big wave of aging and perpetual chronic diseases, there are so many challenges and opportunities for now and the future. Nurses are in a key position to be part of this big wave by playing many roles in the care delivery system. As nurses our essence is always care. Care for the whole person. With the ideation of integrated care model, nurses will be able to converge collaborative efforts for the wholesomeness of a patient's health even beyond healthcare, which will ultimately bring the value to patient, and that is the reason behind all we do.

Reflection by: Ms. Chen Xiao Juan, Assistant Nurse Clinician

Nursing Leadership: Reflecting on the Past as We Look Into the Future

Leadership is a complex, multi-faceted role that entails many different responsibilities. It can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what the most important role is. Nonetheless, the integrated skillsets of an effective leader are to influence, inspire, motivate and guide the team to maximize their efficiency and achieve a common goal. Leaders significantly affect an organization's culture. Successful leaders play critical roles in creating and shaping organisational culture. Now at 50, and having witnessed changes in the nursing profession for the past 30 years, I can compare past and present styles of leadership. I want to reflect on my encounters with different leaders and styles exhibited through different personalities and characters.

My first encounter with leaders were senior staff nurses in the wards. As a student nurse back in 1991, still wearing a folder crisp nurse hat, I was unimpressed and uninspired with what I saw. Every morning, we watch the seniors standby the densely-occupied wards, and announcing methodically to all the inpatients, "Wake up, get up. We are making the beds!" My reporting officer was a stickler for rules. There was no room for suggestions nor ideas. Everything ran efficiently like clockwork with no room for ambiguity nor grey areas. Seldom were any incident reports filed because errors were almost unheard of. Patients do get well, although there was no talk of patient experience nor personal touch. Compliance, be it from ward staff or patients themselves, was the order of the day.

Through the years, I had work with leaders at all levels and have witnessed how traditional leadership principles evolved at the rise of a new era. I have the good fortune of meeting remarkable leaders who have positively influenced my professional development and growth. These leaders exhibit a distinctive common traits and qualities of high commitment, resilience, humility and strategic in leading the team. They are tough but compassionate and inspiring, harnessing on staff potential with empathy and kindness to achieve desirable outcome.

I met a former hospital CEO who was a down to earth ground commander, an early adopter of the "go green" movement and health lifestyle advocator. The authoritative figure strives to influence through walking the talk, such as going about with his lunchbox to pack food and leading group exercise for nursing leaders on some Friday evening. He treats staff as family. I recall an occasion I was seated beside him attending a town hall meeting when he shared with me a peeled orange; a gesture that warmth my heart to this day because he made me felt like a family. I respect him for being the exemplary role model in setting the tone for the organisation he envisages.

Another leader I had crossed paths with was an eminent senior nurse leader who has worked her way up the career ladder from an enrolled nurse. Rooted in the values of equity, relationships and listening. Her door was always open for anyone to step right in and chat. On a few occasions, I did so and for two hours and counting, poured out my bottled-up emotions. Yet she was all ears and listened to me attentively without interruption. She would then

offer her own non-imposing perspectives and I appreciated her for being non-judgmental and empathetic understanding. The relationship was an open, equal and authentic one despite the rank gap and seniority. We shared common passion on leadership, and we both learned and grew through those conversations.

Apprenticeship is a practice of the past. Now, the buzzwords are preceptor, mentor, coach and empowerment. In the past, we did not dare to ask questions. We did not speak up and suggest alternatives or ideas, unless called to. We were expected to just follow and carry out instructions. Back then, we were disadvantaged by the lack of spontaneity, creativity and innovation. We watched our own turfs, did not collaborate nor cross-learn; we imposed inhibitions, and very simply, did as we were told through an honest day's work.

The flipside to this, however, has to do with ambiguity which may surface, and the calibre of the younger generation of nurses. I contemplate if the new nurses are ready to pick up the pace and be responsible, self-motivated and independent learners who take initiative. In a faster-paced healthcare environment, we need collaboration and innovation to do things better. We learn to embrace changes and improvement on the go. While the past focused on command, control and structure, it also thrived on a carrot and stick system. Here at Alexandra Hospital (AH), we have the Alex Creed as the north star to guide and shape our culture and learning, while staying fun and relevant.

Although, the old school traits of “control and command” still ring bell in today's practice. I believe different situation called for different leadership approach. As for my own leadership style, I prefer to be consulted and tapped on for ideas and suggestions. Relying on a democratic, consultative approach, I found such participative style can better promote trust and engaged independent thinking for development. Guidance and handholding are still essential, while remaining firm and flexible. As a leader, my priority is to instill self-confidence, accountability and self-leadership value in my junior nurses. More importantly, I emphasise to them that we need to find meaning in what we do. Discovering the purpose is what will motivate us every day and keep our faith alive through hard time. We all need something that is bigger than us.

I will encourage people to join nursing anytime. There was a period of time about ten years ago when I left nursing for seven years. An opportunity to join the private sector for IT marketing related work came up. Higher pay and jet-setting were not enough perks to give me the fulfilment even in my prime. I am now in a privileged position to help the next generation of nurses to positively impact them to become leaders in their own right; just like how I have benefitted from mentors over the years.

Reflection by: Ms. Constance Chua, Senior Nurse Manager

I Hope to be An Inspiration to Nurses That Will Come After Me

I knew I wanted to be a nurse when I saw how my relatives, most of whom are registered nurses, took care of my grandmother who was battling cancer at the time. I knew my grandmother was comfortable and happy when she passed away because she knew that she was provided the best medical care by her close family who are healthcare professionals as well. I wanted to follow my relatives' steps and contribute, in some way, to improving people's health and lives. I'm proud of the fact that every day I am one step closer to being just like them.

As a nurse, I feel satisfied by helping patients overcome their burden of managing their health conditions, as well as supporting their families through difficult times. Seeing my patients suffer has a profound psychological impact on me, and it drives my desire to assist them to ease their suffering. Helping people in need has a positive impact on their lives and the community.

Nowadays, I feel like nurses are stepping out from under the doctors' shadows. We are actively participating in the evaluation of patients' care and the design of their discharge plans. We are given so much more respect and responsibilities these days, compared to the situation from years ago.

Nursing is rewarding career in other aspects too. There are new experiences to be faced every single day that require fast thinking and the changing environment thrills me. I learn new things every day, and the opportunity for growth is almost unlimited. The nursing field is dynamic and varied, with different approaches to wellness and healthcare being researched and discovered to improve an individual's quality of life. As someone who likes to take on new challenges and is keen on learning new knowledge, I believe that nursing will offer an effective environment to utilise my strengths.

Through different encounters in the healthcare setting, I have decided to fulfil my spiritual needs and explore missionary nursing. I am inspired to offer my nursing skills to help individuals in different parts of the world who do not have proper medical care. I believe my drive to work in such environments will be an inspiration to many nurses that will come after me.

Reflection by: Ms. Fiza Fazira Bte Kamal, Staff Nurse I

A Healthcare Team That Operates Like Clockwork

Being in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for a year has not only broadened my perspective towards nursing patients under my care, but also allowed me to hone my interpersonal skills by working with a multidisciplinary team to provide care for our patients.

The daily ward rounds had granted me opportunities to observe how the healthcare team worked together to provide effective care for patients and their family members, and I had through these observations gained valuable insights. While each of the cases I have witnessed are unique in their own, one case was the most impressionable to me.

It happened during a physical assessment when my colleague realised that the patient had sustained a subcutaneous emphysema – the medical term for air becoming trapped in tissues beneath the skin. Without any hesitation, she promptly called for the doctors and further interventions were performed and a desired outcome was achieved. It was an impressionable moment to have witnessed how the healthcare team operated like clockwork during such a complex and time sensitive situation, all these whilst having to assuage the fear of anxious family members who are denied access due to Covid-19 restrictions. This was where I learnt that timely updating of patient's status to family members was crucial.

In hindsight, these experiences have given me an extensive insight into the key characteristics of what being a nurse must possess. These traits are namely; patience, competence, and openness. I believe that with time and sufficient nurturing; I will someday be able to embody these traits too.

While it is true that the daily duties of being a nurse can be both physically and mentally draining, the job satisfaction I derive from knowing that the patients under my care are receiving the best patient care is what drives and motivates me. I believe that constant reading to acquire new knowledge would also further develop my skills to become a more competent healthcare provider.

To conclude, I am confident of undertaking the demands of a nurse and will remain committed to overcoming challenges that could arise in the near future. I hope that I can continue to contribute to the advancement of healthcare and provide the best possible treatment for my patients.

Reflection by: Ms. Jeridiah Tan, Staff Nurse I

Contemplating the Nursing-Technology Intersection

Technological advances have been improving the efficiency, accountability and safety of nursing practice, and are poised to make a quantum change in the nature of our profession.

Though there are various formal definitions of nursing and nursing care, I feel that if asked in day-to-day conversation, most of us would give a definition with some element of “patient-centredness” at its core. Nursing has traditionally been, and remains, the healthcare profession most indelibly linked to the patient – nurses provide round-the-clock, bedside care that can define inpatient experiences.

A core component of nursing care is medication administration. Here, technology has been vital in improving patient safety – with electronic medication administration systems and records, prescriptions can be received, reviewed, administered and administration checked and counter-checked with vastly improved efficiency and reduced rates of error.

A related experience that has prompted this reflection on the nursing-technology intersection is one that would be familiar with any AH nurse; the physical “scanning” of patients’ wrist-bands to verify their identity when administering medications. Though an unimpeachably sensible measure to reduce human error and ensure that the correct patient is receiving the correct medication, I’m sure that I’m not the first nurse to detect the initial baulk and slight confusion from newly admitted patients when, after I’ve already asked for their full names and identification numbers, I then proceed to “scan” them like a stock-taker at a supermarket.

Approaching the wrong patient is an unacceptable reason for medication errors. However, has the use of a technological last-step solution changed the nature, or at the very least, the perception of nursing care? I wonder if we want patients to think “My nurse is administering all my medication exactly as prescribed in the system, because she has scanned my unique identification number”, or “my nurse knows me and my condition well and has checked this medication carefully to make sure that I am getting medicine that is mine, and is safe for me”?

Every nurse I know would consider it the gravest of errors to mistake one patient for another. However, especially as a fairly new nurse, I can imagine the stress, workload and time pressures that would have led so many nurses to make this mistake that we have implemented technological solutions to the problem. At its core, my fear is that technology in this case is not being used to facilitate

better patient care, but rather to allow nurses to care for more patients safely. A barely perceptible difference, but one that I feel is vital for nurses in particular to confront.

Hospitals are increasingly introducing technology to improve efficiency, allowing staff to do more, safely. Fall detection devices (infrared systems, pressure sensitive mattresses and floor pads), shower assist modules (patients are “loaded” into shower modules to be showered rather than traditional assisted showers), remote video monitoring systems for patients that would otherwise require close in-person supervision at all times—these are all initiatives that are presently being implemented in Singaporean hospitals to much fanfare. What does this mean for the patient experience, and what does this mean for the profession that is so intricately linked to direct patient care? There might be no quantitative difference between a well-placed infrared camera keeping watch on you in the night and an actual person—in fact, the camera would allow one person to keep so many more patients safe and supervised. However, does it feel different to be monitored by unknown eyes via a remote technological device, or by the nurse you know, sitting at a dimly lit counter in the corridor? Does it feel different for the nurse doing the monitoring?

I do not know how to reconcile these thoughts. There is an inescapable and well documented mismatch between the number of healthcare professionals and the current and impending demand that our ageing society will place on our healthcare system. I have no easy solution to the inevitable need for each healthcare worker to care for as many patients as they safely can. I do know that every nurse I’ve met would do their very best to ensure the best possible care for each and every one of their patients, and that our profession will take these challenges in its stride.

Florence Nightingale was known and is remembered as “the Lady with the Lamp”, an enduring image of her direct, involved bedside care for wounded soldiers when all other medical personnel had retired for the night. It was this personal connection and commitment that captured the social consciousness far more than her radical administrative and theoretical advancements in nursing care and public health. Perhaps the image will remain relevant as we wrestle with what the nursing will look like in the technological future.

Reflection by: Mr. Samuel Yu, Staff Nurse I

Advance Professionalism and Fulfil A Meaningful Calling Together

Shared Governance (SG) is an organisational structure to enhance nurses' empowerment and autonomy, and also to promote shared decision-making to hear the voices of Alex Nurses. I first got learned about Shared Governance when I was in another hospital in 2014. I had the opportunity to attend the training and sharing about SG. Through SG, nurses have a voice in determining nursing practice and standards of patient care. It highlights the value of nursing to the organisation and provides the structure for nurses to share, learn, collaborate, and integrate best practices into their care.

I am very happy and excited that AH has started to embark on the Shared Governance journey. Our Chief Nurse has always emphasised that every nurse matters. As such, by putting a shared governance structure in place, Alex nurses can exercise their voice and play an active role in assuming accountability for their practice. We started with four SG councils, and I was nominated as Advisor for the Nursing Reliability Council. I was confident that I could contribute based on my past experience and training. Most of the council members are not trained and have no idea of how SG and the councils work. It started with uncertainty, but there is also a lot of excitement and curiosity. We all embraced the journey of exploring together; by listening to Chief Nurse's sharing and discussion of viewpoints from the different nurse leaders.

True to our AH culture of FUN, we had so much fun and excitement creating the foundation of the SG councils. In just a short few months' time, I can see the progress of the councils, the increasing confidence of the council chairpersons, and the passion and energy of the council members. It is now time for the ground nurses to familiarise themselves with the four councils by participating in the sharing and engagement sessions. There is more work to be done, and the process will not be easy, but I am confident that we can overcome as a team to get the nursing team ready for Shared Governance as organisational culture.

The Shared Governance journey in AH is just at the beginning stage and I truly believe that we can advance professionalism and fulfil a meaningful calling together as a team.

*Reflection by: Ms. Yang Qiuping,
Senior Nurse Manager*



Words From A Future Nurse

As a student nurse working in Alexandra Hospital (AH), it has been quite a new experience compared to my previous posting, with completely different working styles and environments. The guidance from the Staff Nurses here has been invaluable.

When the Ministry of Health announced that nursing students would be going into clinical postings earlier to provide support for the care teams in hospitals, I felt quite nervous because I did not have much clinical experience prior to this. It was daunting to know that as student nurses, we were part of the essential care team during this exceptional time of a global pandemic.

Before Covid-19 sped up my learning journey, my clinical experiences were limited to placements in school with mannequins as patients – which meant I had only practised my skills on a ‘patient’ that could not move or respond. Therefore, the Covid-19 posting experience felt very intimidating since I now had to deliver care for real patients who would move and respond to me. Time management also came into play very quickly because I can no longer focus on just one patient or task at a time when there are other patients who needed my assistance.

Overall, stepping into AH as a student nurse to support the care team has been a very unnerving but great and fruitful experience. I know that these experiences are the ones that are going to stick with me throughout my career as a nurse after graduation.

Reflection by: Ms. Esther Soh, Nursing Student

A Perfect Balance of Work, Friends and Family





One Care Team One-Stop Care

Here, care is anchored by a doctor, leading our one care team comprising nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, service associates, and supported by specialists.

Five Programmes,
One Redesigned
Healthcare Journey:



**Be
Better**



**Get
Better**



**Live
Better**



**Age
Better**



**Cope
Better**





I am Alex.



KEEN TO JOIN ALEX NURSING?

Agility Learning Engaging eXtraordinary

Alex nurses are collaborative, innovative and think on their feet. Our holistic and person-centric training equips one to think, learn and adapt to different clinical settings, and become an all-rounder. Our vision is to create a community that is healthy and empowered, enjoying quality of life.

Email us at careers_alexandra@nuhs.edu.sg





www.ah.com.sg |   @AlexandraHospitalSG

378 Alexandra Rd, Singapore 159964 Tel: 6908 2222 Email: contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

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