

NEWS & EVENTS

Beyond the uniform: Anne Jenkins, Deputy Matron, King Edward VII's Hospital

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In the latest in a series about the people who make King Edward VII's Hospital tick, we meet Anne Jenkins, deputy matron and quality & risk manager

There are some words in the English language that have the power to immediately conjure up a fully rounded set of feelings and associations. 'Matron' is one of them; and Anne Jenkins, deputy matron of King Edward VII's Hospital seemingly embodies them all: the care, the discipline, the comfort and the competence. It's hard to believe—meeting her in the hospital's wood panelled library—that she hasn't walked straight out of a book.

Nursing has been part of Anne's life for as long as she can remember: a daughter of a St John's Ambulance transport officer, from the age of five she was on the road helping her dad set up. Becoming a St John's cadet, aged 11, was an

inevitability. “That was when I decided,” she says. “I wanted to be a hairdresser at first, but being in St John’s Ambulance, I realised I wanted to be a nurse. It was my ultimate aim.”

After completing her O-levels, she started working in customer services at British Telecom. Even this had relevance. “I was trained in customer care. It stood me in good stead for my life as a nurse: dealing with people, sorting out problems.”

As part of the company’s first aid team, she took part in competitions between institutions like the police, the fire brigade and the post office, in which teams were given a fake emergency scenario and assessed in their ability to evaluate the situation and triage the injured. “It really reinforced my ambition,” says Anne. “I planned to train at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, where I lived, but my sister lived in London, and encouraged me to apply to the Royal Masonic Hospital. We’re close, and I wanted to move away from home properly, not around the corner—so I did.”

The rest was nursing, more nursing and the piano, which she played to an impressive standard, making her the go-to pianist for Christmas shows. “I was in the choir as well, so I could continue my love for music,” says Anne. The Royal Masonic was a private hospital, but as part of the students’ training they would also attend St Mary’s, Roehampton, so Anne was given a taste of both private and NHS approaches to nursing care.

Anne’s first job as a qualified nurse was in the A&E department at Middlesex Hospital, which plunged her in at the deep end for 14 months. After that, she was set to make a radical change by working on a cruise liner. It may not have seemed it at the time, but it was good luck that led her to the hospital bedside of a little boy with undetected mumps just before she was about to leave. She contracted mumps, delayed her departure and in the meantime met someone coming off the boat who told her “a few things that made me think the cruise liner wasn’t for me,” she says meaningfully.





Since joining in 1983, Anne has risen through the ranks.

It was then that she got a call from the imaging department at Middlesex Hospital asking her if she'd like to apply for a position there. "I thought, well this is something new and different. I love X-rays," she says, with the same sort of passion you might speak of detective stories.

"I love looking at them, working them out and seeing if I can spot the problem." It would mean acquiring a new skill set—a guiding ambition in Anne's working life, and one she still firmly believes in. "I have always been one for further education.

I enjoyed that for three years, but then decided the time had come to go into more generalised nursing." At which point, King Edward VII's Hospital appeared on the horizon. "I had done agency work on the weekends in NHS hospitals on and off, and I found it extremely stressful to go on a ward with two agency nurses looking after 30 patients. Nursing is about caring," she continues passionately, "and there wasn't time to give personalised care." Having come to this conclusion, when the job of staff nurse came up at King Edward VII's, she hesitated only to ask a respected colleague—a cardiologist—whether he knew of the place. "He said, 'I work there,' and that was the trigger. I applied."

Since joining in 1983, Anne has risen through the ranks. She started as a night nurse ("seven days on, seven days off. It was exhausting"), but quickly moved to day nursing, then to a deputy sister role. "In 1990 I was given the role of senior sister. I saw so many changes in these years—back when I started, there were shared bathrooms, across the corridor. Now it's all en-suite, of course."

She enjoyed the work, but her hankering for education hadn't left her. "I loved my patients, but I felt I needed something to enhance the training and quality side of things, so I started a master's degree in evaluation of clinical practice." In the meantime, she inherited the roles of deputy matron and project manager for accreditation from a colleague who had gone on maternity leave. By the time Anne had finished her master's, her predecessor had decided not to return to work.

"It was really exciting, getting my degree and carrying on here. I took on health and safety for the organisation, too. That man is my guru," she says, pointing to a man providing training in the next room: a health and safety advisor who has provided his services to the hospital for 22 years.

"I love health and safety and risk management. Risk management goes hand in hand with quality of care. You can't do one without the other," Anne continues.

King Edward VII's is committed to constantly improving, updating and innovating in order to safeguard its exceptional standard of care. "Doing my degree fitted in with that ethos of continuous improvement. With this in mind, I then went on to undertake a certificate in risk management to round off my skills. I love talking to patients and spending time with them, and being able to do that means you can ensure that whatever care you give is the optimum. Going out and learning how to improve things is to me the most important thing." One powerful example is nutrition, which has been transformed in Anne's time. "Nutrition is an important component of care as you require a good balanced diet to assist with healing," she explains.

On the days when she is training, attending internal or external meetings or preparing reports, Anne will be dressed in a suit with a badge that reads 'quality and risk manager'. "I'm two people really," she grins—today, her hair's in a high, neat bun and she's dressed in her royal blue deputy matron's uniform. She so clearly personifies the qualities this role demands—"to be able to understand people, to listen and let them talk, to encourage, to be empathetic, to empower rather than instruct," she lists—and is so obviously known by everyone from cleaner to consultant, that she doesn't really need the badge that comes with this outfit. Though of course she wears it. She is Anne Jenkins, deputy matron, and rules are rules.

For more information, visit [King Edward VII's Hospital](#)



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Beyond the uniform: What makes King Edward VII's Hospital tick

At the Dermatology Treatment Centre at King Edward VII’s Hospital, I carry out dermatological investigations, screening and minor outpatient procedures, and I am also one of a small team of dermatologists available to the main hospital if they need us. ▶

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