

Sue Cross

International Nurse Practitioner from the United Kingdom

Sue Cross was one of the first cohort of nurse practitioners educated at the Royal College of Nursing program instituted by Barbara Stilwell. The small group of 15 new practitioners paved the way for evolution of nurse practitioner practice in the United Kingdom. After graduation Sue practiced in respiratory health and become a leader in the UK and internationally. She was part of the first international conference the UK/US Experience in 1993 and chaired the newly formed Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Nurse Practitioner Association. She was instrumental in forming the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Nurse Practitioner Advanced Practice Nursing Network NP/APNN). Over the years she has been a leader, author, colleague, and mentor. She has had a significant impact on the advancement of nurse practitioner practice throughout the world.



Interview Abstract

Sue Cross began her career as a practice nurse in the United Kingdom. In the interview she discusses the limitations and her journey to become one of the first nurse practitioners in the UK. She discussed some of the challenges in developing the new role and overcoming some scepticism of other nurses.

She emphasized the importance of networking and describes how support from the United States enabled her to become a leader the first chair of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Nurse Practitioner Association and chair of the newly formed International Council of Nurses (ICN) Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nurses Network.

She further describes how with her colleagues they developed new skills developing strategic plans and working with other organizations. The first group demonstrated the value of nurse practitioner practice and provided inspiration for others. Sue became the first international fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners.

Biographical Sketch

Over years Sue has had experience as a school nurse, practice nurse, and nurse practitioner, as an Associate Director of Primary Care Nursing and National Project Manager for the Department of Health. During these years she also developed a love of teaching and became a Director for the National Respiratory Training Centre (now Education for Health).

In 1992 she became the Chair of the RCN Nurse Practitioner Association and with other like-minded individuals, laboured to make nursing in general practice recognised as a profession to be

proud of. At this time, she co-edited with Vanny Rimmer, the Nurse Practitioner Manual of Clinical Skills and the 2nd edition was published in July 2007.

Sue along with the American advanced nurse (Madrean Schober) started the ball rolling for the development of the International Council of Nurses, Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Nursing Network. Sue has published widely on aspects of education, asthma, allergy and general practice nursing both in the UK and abroad. She has also co-authored 'Vital Asthma' with Dave Burns from the Respiratory UK Training Centre.

In her spare time Sue flies light aircraft and plays the piano.

Keywords: Advanced practice nurse, international nursing, nurse practitioner, nurse practitioners in the United Kingdom, international nurse practitioners.

Transcript

Sue Cross
First International Nurse Practitioner Fellow
Interview
AANP Oral History Project

Interview with the First international FAANP Member

Prof Sue Cross BSC (Hons), PGCE, Sue Cross

Interviewer: Barbara Sheer FAANP

May 1, 2020

NP programme, 1989 -1991, Royal College of Nursing (RCN), UK



Introduction: Sue Cross was one of the first cohort of nurse practitioners educated at the Royal College of Nursing program instituted by Barbara Stilwell. We met in 1990 and have worked together over the years from the initial UK/US conference through the growth of the ICN NP/APN network. She has been a leader, colleague and mentor. It was a pleasure to connect again to capture her reflections and thoughts.

Bio: Professor of Primary Care Nursing London South Bank University, UK, Nurse Advisor Londonwide LMCs and Nurse Advisor to HMP Bedford

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How and when did you become interested in becoming a nurse practitioner (NP) and what was your motivation?

I went back to nursing after raising my family in 1986, as a practice nurse in a general practice office – there weren't many practice nurses in the UK at this time. I loved the freedom of the role, being able to develop the health care I gave, according to the types and needs of the local population and the patients as individuals. There were, however, certain limitations as the training and education for practice nurses, at the time, concentrated on practical skills rather than public health initiatives, disease management and health education

I heard about the NP course at the RCN, applied and was fortunately accepted. The course seemed to be the answer as it was the next step in the education and role of the nurse working in general practice.

How did you go on to develop the role in the UK and what experiences did you bring?

As we were coming up to qualify, we realised we needed to form ourselves into a formal Association to be able to develop the role in the UK. At the same time, the RCN with the support of Barbara Stilwell, realised the potential. We formed a formal group within the auspices of the RCN. About this time The USA NPs invited us over to their conference to celebrate the first NP group in the UK. As chair of the Association I had the opportunity to get to know American NPs who were very keen to help us. They sent me documents (as chair of the group) to help on leadership, development, research and policy development. They were always at the end of the phone helping us with our problems and always trying to come up with solutions. Madrean Schober and Zo Demarchi, from AANP were a pivotal support team at that time.

Our way of developing in those early years, wasn't random. We established a plan using a project management style, concentrating on specific areas, so at the end of a year we could see what we had aimed to achieve and what we had actually achieved. There were 15 of us, having different strengths, skills and interests and we drew on all of those. Our main areas were to raise awareness of the NP role to patients and community health care providers, in what we could bring to health care in this country and how we could compliment other community health professional specialisms.

What experience did you bring?

Probably life skills but mainly enthusiasm. It was very exciting being involved in something new and seeing that the sky was the limit on where the role could travel and the benefit we could bring to our patients and communities.

How did you gather support from Stakeholders?

We had the support of the CEO of the RCN (as this course was financially beneficial to the RCN) so we had what we would say in the UK, 'the support of the top brass'. We wanted to communicate with the organisations in the UK. The organisations we needed to work with were the community health care organisations ie Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), other national nursing organisations and health industry.

The RCGP was obviously important as we worked closely with our general practitioner (GP) colleagues and needed them to experience the value of employing and working with a NP.

Nursing organisations were important as it was necessary that our nursing colleagues recognised that we could all work together.

The health industry was vital as we would need funding to help in the development.

How did you work with these organisations?

We developed a strategic plan which we fine-tuned for each organisation. This showed what the benefit was to them as well as to the NP. We always went to the person responsible for the organisation ie the Chairman or Chief Executive Officer. We always found this was more successful than dealing with middle management. We often found that their expertise was superior to ours and we often had to alter our plan depending on what their ideas and needs were. Compromises were often made, and we soon had to learn real business skills to have successful outcomes.

We quickly had to learn research skills, how to hold our own in important meetings, how to present our position eloquently at major conferences and how to write papers in major national journals. All the time keeping our feet on the ground and not losing sight of what the value was of the nurse practitioner.

Did you experience any challenges and how were they resolved?

The main issues we encountered were from other nurses. We assumed that if there were any problems it would be from GPs, but that was not the case. Physicians seemed to recognise the value of the NP role very early on. The nurses, not surprisingly perhaps, saw us as a threat to their position. We tried to confront these issues head on. We met with the leaders of the various nurse organisations, discussed the issues and explained our plans for development. We also gave them details of the training and what was to be expected from the qualified NP. I think we realised that only time would resolve some of these issues when staff realised the NP was part of a team to support the health of the community.

Are there any experiences you would like to speak about?

I am most proud of is the role I played in the development of the International Council of Nurses, Nurse Practitioner/ Advanced Practice Nurse Network. I think the initial idea, development and on-going sustaining of this organisation is a real credit to all of us who were involved in those early years. It's a great example that if you really worked as a team with effective leadership and a shared goal, it doesn't matter if the outcome is a local initiative, national or international.

What was the most challenging in your career/most important?

I think my role (as explained in the last question) was hugely challenging and rewarding. Equally so was my role on the development of national career a framework for nurses working in general practice in the UK. This was a national programme that I was asked to lead by the Department of Health. It took 3 years to develop and involved research, policy development and an educational framework that underpinned the framework for all roles and specialities of nurses working in the community practice. For this work I was awarded Professorships by 2 London Universities

Is there anything you would want to change?

I do think nurses are very weighed down by politics these days. When we first started as NPs, the world was our oyster and we felt we had the freedom to express ourselves to the benefit of our profession and our patient population. Now there are many more controls and I think, sometimes,

professionals are not always seen as the experts but as people that have to be controlled and follow strict guidelines and protocols, so this stifles expression and talent.

I would also like to see a 'can do' attitude in the health service rather than just the whining that sometimes goes on. I would like to see nurses working as equals with their medical colleagues rather than be employed by them.

What do you see as the most pivotal moments in the past years?

The main game changer has to be Covid 19 – unfortunately. In the UK over the last years there have been senseless targets for managers to reach. They have been scorned and demonised, good men and women have lost jobs, promotions and careers. The targets are built upon outcomes which sounds sensible however, with cut backs in staff training, financial cutbacks and a growing complex and elderly population it causes huge pressures on community and hospital provision.

With the recent pandemic all health professionals and other essential staff (cleaners, porters, cooks etc) have been respected and encouraged just to do the job they've been employed to do. This pandemic has allowed everyone to go above and beyond their job and nurses and doctors have magnificently been working together. Nurse practitioners and nurse specialists have been given the respect they have deserved for years. IT systems have been implemented so quickly to deal with the problem so there is much more efficiency in the health care system.

The positive changes that have occurred are far more than we have ever achieved. I just hope these changes remain and we don't drift back to the way we were. It's just awful that thousands of people have had to lose their lives in the meantime. I feel very humbled.

What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?

- Remember you work as part of a team with patients and colleagues.
- Put yourself in your colleagues' shoes so you understand their needs and wants.
- If you want to make major changes to health outcomes at a local or national level, communicate with the senior staff, don't bother with middle management
- Don't get involved with internal politics and complain or whine to your colleagues, that doesn't make change it only causes poison in an organisation
- Go on learning for all your working life
- Remember compromise, sometimes, is the only solution
- Love nursing, be brave and be the best you can be

What do you see as the role of the Nurse Practitioners/Advanced Practice Nursing in the next 25 years?

For the leaders to remember they are not there for gratification, but they are there for the global workforce. To change over the next 25 years depending on the needs of local, national and international forces. To always be inclusive.

