Mary Seacole
The ultimate role model

Mary Seacole was the first example of someone from overseas who made an overwhelming difference to health care in the UK. She also encountered the same sorts of prejudice which NHS workers faced in the 20th Century.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1805 where her mother, a free black woman, worked as a ‘doctress’ and awakened her interest in nursing, Mary made her own way after the death of her husband Edward Horatio Seacole, a godson of Lord Nelson.

In 1854 she heard about the Crimean War raging in Europe and set off for England. She offered her services to the nursing agencies recruiting for the war effort but no-one would take her on. Even Florence Nightingale refused her an interview. Mary had encountered racial prejudice during earlier travels in America but had never expected to find it in London.

Finally, she made her own way to the front and quickly set up her ‘British Hotel’ for the troops. Here, Mary provided hot meals and other basic home comforts as well as looking after the sick and wounded. Since she also ventured into the battle zone, news of her daring exploits soon reached England. Mary was hailed as a national heroine and received a commendation from Queen Victoria. Because Mary had invested a lot of her own money in the hotel, she was left bankrupt when the war suddenly ended in 1856. However, a group of eminent statesmen, along with many of the soldiers she had cared for, contributed to a fund which quickly paid off her debts.

Her autobiography, The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, was an immediate bestseller and Mary was able to live the rest of her life in security and comfort. She died in London in 1881 where her gravestone in Kensal Rise Cemetery reads: ‘Here lies a notable nurse who cared for the sick and wounded in the West Indies, in Panama and on the battle field of the Crimea’.

Within the NHS today, Mary Seacole’s name lives on in the Mary Seacole Research Centre, a collaborative initiative between De Montfort University and The Royal College of Nursing. There is also the Mary Seacole Award made annually to a nurse, midwife or health visitor from black and minority ethnic communities, which enables them to undertake a particular area of work or study which will provide a health gain for their community.
1946
The National Health Bill becomes law, based on the principle that good healthcare should be available to all, regardless of wealth.

Britain needs at least 42,000 more hospital staff in the new health service – nurses, midwives, ancillary workers, cleaners, cooks and porters. The most serious nursing shortages were in hospitals for the chronically sick, in mental hospitals and in geriatric nursing, none of which was a particularly popular area of nursing.

Bernadette McGrath came from West Kerry to the East End of London to train as a nurse in 1947. ‘The home sister welcomed and showed me my room, then told me to go to tea in an hour’s time. Tea was bread and jam. After tea I returned to the home sister, by which time more student nurses had arrived. Half of the group of 18 were Irish, three of the English had been through the war, and one was from Nigeria. We were all there for the Preliminary Training School for three months. Failing two of the weekly exams in succession, having an affair with a member of the staff, smoking in uniform, or if one of the patients in your care got a bed sore, would all have disqualified us from nursing there.’

1948
Aneurin Bevan launches the National Health Service by opening Park Hospital in Manchester (later Trafford General).

The arrival at Tilbury on 22 June of the Empire Windrush brings some 500 Caribbean men and women to the UK, marking the start of post-war mass immigration from the Caribbean.

Recruitment of nurses from Ireland continues, having gone on throughout the war, inviting women to apply to hospitals in and around the Greater Manchester area, and elsewhere. The 1950s and 1960s are the heyday of recruitment, as the NHS offers women more jobs and better promotion prospects than are to be found in Ireland.
Joyce Bleasdille-Lumsden gained experience in nursing before coming to the UK. She volunteered at the then Colony Hospital and the St David pharmacy in Grenada. ‘I started in the Colony Hospital as a probationer when I was 18 and then transferred to the Richmond Hill Sanitorium. The matron there encouraged me to go to England to do my general training, and she helped me apply to many hospitals and the Stoke Mandeville Group accepted me for student nurse training.’

Once she arrived at Tynesdale General Hospital, ‘The matron sent me to the sewing room to be measured for a uniform. They had me measured for a green uniform and and I noticed one or two nurses in purple uniform. So when I went back I asked my Jamaican friend, “What is the green uniform?” She said: “We are pupil nurses, a lower grade of nurses, stupid nurses”. I went back to the matron and I said to her “I was accepted for student nurse training, not pupil nurse training.” I was told I had to do pupil nurse training, otherwise they would send me back to Grenada.’

Advocate or Barbados Beacon run advertisements inviting young women students to apply to train as nurses in Britain. In 1949, for instance, the Barbados Beacon advertises for 31 women to work as nursing auxiliaries in hospitals in Bristol, Cardiff, Dartford, Edinburgh, Lincolnshire, Loughborough, Manchester and North Staffordshire. Candidates must be aged 18 to 30, literate and prepared to sign a three-year contract.

1949

The Ministries of Health and Labour, together with the Colonial Office, the General Nursing Council (GNC) and The Royal College of Nursing, begin a deliberate policy of recruiting from the British colonies, particularly the West Indies.

From now until the early Fifties advertisements appear in the nursing press encouraging applicants from the colonies. In the Caribbean, newspapers such as the Barbados Beacon, the Barbados Advocate or Barbados Beacon run advertisements inviting young women students to apply to train as nurses in Britain. In 1949, for instance, the Barbados Beacon advertises for 31 women to work as nursing auxiliaries in hospitals in Bristol, Cardiff, Dartford, Edinburgh, Lincolnshire, Loughborough, Manchester and North Staffordshire. Candidates must be aged 18 to 30, literate and prepared to sign a three-year contract.

1949

1950

General election returns Labour government.

Some 5,000 black Commonwealth citizens have arrived in Britain since 1948 to work or join relatives. During the Fifties the yearly rate at which they come to UK increases so that by the end of the decade between 20,000 and 30,000 a year are joining the British economy. As British citizens, they expect a warm welcome but most encounter racial discrimination.

Grenadan-born David Pitt (later Lord Pitt) sets up medical practice in London.

Brighton General Hospital recruits black nurses for the first time.

Louise Garvey, who trained as a cadet nurse at Congleton Hospital, now part of East Cheshire NHS Trust, remembers that the early years in the NHS were ‘good because people sort of got on and supported one another’, but that both patients and staff could be racist. Despite this, she set her sights on becoming a sister: ‘I did extra training, whatever was going in the hospital. Opportunities were always there for nursing but at the same time there was the racism and the feeling at the time that we were only there to do the bedside things. You put yourself forward to ensure that whatever internal training is being offered you get on board ... I used to do what I called the watching game. I would watch and see what training was available, who was going for it and how often. I used to challenge the situation. I would say nurse A and B and whatever, she’s had x amount of training, why haven’t I? This training is available and I am interested, here is my application and that’s how you got on in those days. You had to fight for your chances.’

Rationing of clothes ends in Britain.
1951

The NHS costs about £358 million annually, far higher than expected. The Labour government introduces charges for spectacles and dentures. Aneurin Bevan, architect of the NHS, resigns from the cabinet in protest. Conservatives win general election.

Florence Udell, Colonial Office Chief Nursing Officer (COCNO), goes to the Caribbean to meet with senior nursing officers. Colonial governors, the Ministries of Health and Labour and the Colonial Office worked together to recruit and select women workers for employment in British hospitals. The theoretical aim of recruitment policy in Britain and the Caribbean, both now and later, is to fill vacancies in British hospitals but also to train nurses - and other workers - who would return to the Caribbean to help develop health services there.

1952

Prescription charges of one shilling (5p) are introduced and a flat rate of a pound for ordinary dental treatment comes in on June 1.

The US government passes more stringent immigration laws, making it more difficult for Caribbean migrants to gain entry. Many turn instead to Britain, which still has a relatively relaxed admissions policy.

Dr Anthony Lewis left Jamaica in 1962 to study dentistry at the University of Leeds. At the time "there was a big need for dentists in Jamaica. The government were offering these scholarships and I was successful. I came to the UK in 1962. It was a very, very bad winter that year. I came over by British Airways and landed at London (Heathrow) Airport."

While studying at Leeds, where he had been the only Caribbean student, he worked as a dentist in the NHS, working in rural Yorkshire and the coalfields. He graduated in 1968 and got a job as a house officer at the Leeds Dental Hospital, where he worked until 1971. He returned to Jamaica, where he became the first dentist appointed to the Bustamante Hospital for Children. In 1999 he was appointed director of dental surgery in the Ministry of Health in Jamaica. He retired from the ministry in 2003 and now runs his own private practice in Barbados.

1953

Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. More than 300,000 new homes are built in Britain.

Francis Crick and James Watson announce the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA, the basic material of heredity.

Smoking-cancer link established.

1954

Food rationing ends in Britain.

Daily visiting for children in hospitals starts being introduced, the previous practice having been to allow them only a one-hour visit at weekends.

The Barbados Advocate reports that some landladies and lodging houses are refusing to accept ‘coloured colonials’.

Grace May Yu was born in Hong Kong in 1938. She was one of the first girls to leave Hong Kong to start a career in the UK and she began working in the NHS in 1954. Her first post was at the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital in Margate. She was the only Chinese person at this hospital. Throughout her career she moved to various hospitals in the North West, her last post before retiring was at Cardiff Hospital.

Grace is happily married and has two grown up children Dr Ray Chow, who lives in Los Angeles and Des Chow, who has worked in GMAS, South Manchester University Hospitals Foundation Trust and is now at North Cheshire Hospitals Trust.

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Grace May Yu
1955

Conservatives win general election.

Selection committees are set up in the Caribbean to choose nursing recruits for NHS hospitals. British government offers some financial help but most recruits fund themselves. About 3,000 colonial women are training in NHS hospitals. Most black recruits are forced to take up SEN training rather than SRN.

1958

The NHS introduces a polo and diptheria vaccination programme for everyone under the age of 15, leading to an immediate and dramatic reduction in cases of both diseases.

An Edinburgh doctor, Michael Woodruff, performs the first UK kidney transplant, involving a set of 49-year-old identical twins.

1959

General election returns Conservative government with big majority. David Pitt stands as a Labour Party candidate but fails in both this and the 1970 election, to get elected.

Nurses receive a 12 per cent pay increase; their pay still lags far behind those of teachers and other comparable professionals.

1960

Immigration from South Asia starts to increase, equaling that from the Caribbean.

After becoming disillusioned with West Indian politics David Pitt settled in London where he established a medical practice that he ran for more than 30 years. He was the first African-Caribbean to be elected to London County Council, and the first Black physician to head the British Medical Association. In the 1950s, Pitt was one of the few Black people active in defending the growing Black population of Great Britain against discrimination and prejudice. In the 1960s and 1970s, he organized to help immigrants and improve race relations. In 1975 Prime Minister Harold Wilson appointed Pitt to the House of Lords as Lord Pitt of Hampstead.

Dr Manju Bhavnani OBE

Role: Consultant Haematologist (retired)
Location: Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust
Born in: Delhi, India
Start date: 1971

One of the services that I was involved in developing was a local Cancer unit at Wigan, where patients could have chemotherapy treatment given by Christie doctors who came to Wigan to see them. It was an accessible service which meant patients did not have to travel. As a result of this I was awarded an OBE.

Celebrating our Diversity and Multi-Ethnic Contribution
1961
Oral contraceptive – the pill, becomes available.

There are about 500,000 Caribbean and South Asian people in Britain – about one per cent of the population.

Enoch Powell, Minister of Health, announces an 11 per cent increase in costs of NHS. He doubles prescription and other charges.

The NHS begins recruiting doctors from India and Pakistan.

1962
Commonwealth Immigrants Act ends open access for Commonwealth citizens. Entry restricted to those who have been issued with employment vouchers, or those who can support themselves without working.

Would-be nurses need to have employment vouchers. Labour opposition leader, Hugh Gaitskell, calls the act ‘a plain anti-colour measure’.

Royal College of Physicians confirms links between smoking, cancer and heart disease.

SEN nurses earn about £2 per week. Nurses campaign for more pay.

1963
Minister of Health Enoch Powell announces a 10-year plan of community care under an expanding NHS, and recruits help from the doctors of the Indian sub-continent.

More than 18,000 doctors answer his call, arriving fresh from medical schools, full of hopes and ambitions. But instead of getting posts in teaching hospitals or top medical fields, many find that the only doors open to them are in the ‘Cinderella’ specialities of mental health, geriatrics and accident and emergency. Others discover that the only opportunities offered are as GPs in Britain’s most deprived inner city or industrial urban areas. Many of them face overt prejudice.

Numbers of West Indian arrivals in Britain fall to an average of less than 14,000 a year.

Surgeons in Leeds perform successful kidney transplant.

Nina Vekaria
Clinical Trials Co-ordinator, Oncology,
Royal Preston Hospital

Nina came over from Kenya to Preston in 1962, when she was just three. As the only Asian person in her school Nina encountered many challenges as she grew up, but emerged with sufficiently good A levels to apply for the SRN course in Preston. ‘I wasn’t accepted on the SRN course. I think because there were hardly any Asians at that time and because I was already married. They offered me the two-year SEN course which I took. I was really keen to transfer to SRN and there were chances to do so, but they still wouldn’t allow me to take them up.’

Nina combined working for several years on night duty in neuro-surgical wards with bringing up her three children and studying for a degree in professional practice. Since 2003, she has been working as a Clinical Trials Co-ordinator in oncology at Preston Royal. Nina is proud of working for the NHS. ‘I do believe in the NHS. In oncology you can see improvements for the patients all the time such as shorter waiting times and important developments in treatments.’

Nina Vekaria
Clinical Trials Co-ordinator, Oncology,
Royal Preston Hospital

Dhirenkumar Patel
Role: Superintendent Radiographer
Location: Salford Royal Infirmary
Born in: Kampala, Uganda
Start date: 1978

My contribution is that I have set up a department that is tightly run and well balanced. We provide what the patient needs at that time, they get diagnosed, they get treated and they go home.

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1964

A Labour government is elected under Harold Wilson. Peter Griffiths, Conservative MP, is elected in Smethwick on a racist ticket.

Guyana-born Daphne Steele becomes Britain’s first black matron, having risen through the ranks as a midwife at St Winifred’s Hospital, West Yorkshire.

1965

Race Relations Act outlaws discrimination in public places and sets up Race Relations Board to investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination.

Government restricts spending on housing, schools and hospitals.

White Paper on Commonwealth immigration proposes annual limit of 8,500 employment vouchers a year to be issued mainly to skilled and professional workers.

1966

General election returns Labour government.

Wages freeze in Britain.

1967

National Front forms.


First heart transplant operation takes place, South Africa.

In Britain, health improvements mean deaths from TB have dropped to about 2,000 a year from about 23,000 a year in 1948. Coronary bypass operation and mammography are both developed.

According to the Hindustan Times in 1967 a doctor in India earned one-third of his British counterpart’s salary.

Dr Bashir Qureshi who arrived from Pakistan in the early 1960s, is now Chairman of the NHS Trusts’ Association. Talking about his early experiences in the BBC Four documentary From the Raj to the Rhondda, he said: ‘There was a pecking order and we just accepted it.’

‘If a job came up the English person would get it first, followed by the Scot, the Welshman, the Irish, the Pakistani, the Indian, the Sri Lankan, the West Indian and then the African.’

‘This was always regardless of qualification - but it meant I knew I would get the fifth job to come up.’

Aileen Best was born in Barbados in 1946 and came to England in 1966 to undertake nurse training in Liverpool and has been in Liverpool ever since. Aileen completed her State Enrolled Nurse Certificate in 1968 and then moved to Sefton General in 1969 to begin her Registered Mental Health training.

Between 1973 and 1974 Aileen worked as a Staff Nurse and promoted to Ward Sister on a Psychiatric Unit. In 1979 she moved into the community as a Community Psychiatric Nurse, based in the Royal Liverpool Hospital.

Aileen has completed a Diploma in Psychodynamic Psychotherapy and has assisted with the development of Liverpool Psychotherapy and Consultation Service.

In 1988 Aileen became a Nurse Psychotherapist and undertook further training such as Group Therapy, Family Therapy, and Cognitive Analytic Therapy, and also completed the Certificate in Psychodynamic Supervision. She became a Magistrate in 1999.

Today, Aileen continues to work for the Psychotherapy and Consultation Service working as Principal Psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor and her retirement is due to commence in October 2008.

England win FIFA World Cup

Aileen Best

Celebrating our Diversity and Multi-Ethnic Contribution

NHS 60 years
1968

Commonwealth Immigrants Act imposes further controls on immigration.

Enoch Powell makes notorious ‘rivers of blood’ speech attacking black and Asian immigration.

Race Relations Act widens anti-discrimination to include housing, employment and provision of goods and services; Community Relations Commission (CRC) set up.

Neslyn Watson-Druée (now Dr Neslyn Watson Druee and Chair of Kingston Primary Care NHS Trust) arrived in the UK in 1969. Having worked for a year, she went to see a senior member of staff and told her of my aspirations that I wanted to be trained as a health visitor and she actually said to me that “health visiting wasn’t for black girls.”

‘I decided that I was going to prove her wrong. It seemed as if I was in a catch 22 because I was still on a student visa and she wouldn’t revoke my visa unless I stayed at the hospital as a midwife.

‘I wanted to train as a health visitor so I thought how on earth can I do this? I decided the only way I could get myself out of this trap was if I were to buy property. At that time when you saw places for rent, they would say, ‘No Dogs, No Blacks, No Irish’ in that order. I saw a maisonette going for £9,500 so I went to the GLC housing department and told them I wanted a 100 per cent mortgage. The person laughed at me. So I wrote directly to the director of housing at the GLC. I said that I was a midwife and that I had aspirations to go on to do health visiting training but more importantly, in the here and now, I am giving very valued service. I walked out of that office with a 100 per cent mortgage.’

1969

Enoch Powell calls for repatriation of black immigrants.

Black and minority ethnic nurses now make up about 25% of NHS hospital staff.

1970

Public sector workers strike for better pay.

Royal College of Nurses conduct pay campaign: admit SENs and pupil nurses.

Equal Pay Bill introduced: it becomes law in 1975.

Barbara Newhouse, Sister, Alder Hey Hospital, Liverpool

Barbara came to the UK in 1968 from Trinidad and Tobago. She completed her children training in Myrtle Street and her Midwifery training in Oxford Street. She has worked in the accident and emergency department at Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool for 16 years. She is a dedicated Paediatric Emergency Nurse who has contributed to the care of vulnerable children and their families in Liverpool since 1992.

Deuraj Gunga, Nurse, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust

Deuraj has been employed as a Nurse in Salford since 1969. He has worked as a Night Site Co-ordinator for many years as an integral part of the ‘Hospital at Night’ initiative.

He has demonstrated a strong commitment to the organisation by his length of service and commitment and is a well known and respected figure throughout the Trust.
1971

Immigration Act establishes ‘partiality’: right of immigration restricted to those whose parents or grandparents were born in the UK. Act virtually ends immigration from the Caribbean.

Some 1,500,000 Caribbean and South Asians are living in Britain, about three per cent of the population.

By 1971, 12% of Britain’s nursing staff are Irish and there are more Irish-born nurses in Britain than in Ireland.

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1972

Idi Amin expels Asians from Uganda, giving them under three months in which to leave. 30,000 come to Britain, many of them having been prominent in the medical profession in their country of origin.

Ancillary nursing staff strike for better pay and conditions: the ‘Raise the Roof’ campaign. Black and minority ethnic nurses involve themselves in strike action.

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1974

General election results in a Labour minority government.

NHS undergoes the most far-reaching reorganisation since its foundation.

A three-tiered administration structure is introduced with area health authorities, regional health authorities, and a central department.

Caribbean migration to Britain effectively ends. Immigration from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh continues, but at reduced rate.

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Dr Krishnan Balachandran

Role: Lead Consultant, Paediatrician
Location: Knowsley Primary Care Trust
Born in: Madras, India
Start date: 1973

“When I first started in 1973 Junior Doctors worked 120 hours a week, I was doing a 1 in 2 rota which made it difficult to have a balanced life. We are now working towards 48 hours for Junior Doctors which is extremely helpful and will give Doctors a professional life with a balanced social life.”

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Michael Chan, Lord Chan of Oxton, was born in Singapore in 1940 and died in 2006 after an illustrious career.

He studied medicine at Guy’s Hospital and, after a time as lecturer and consultant paediatrician at the University of Singapore, returned to the UK in 1974 to study Von Willbrand’s Disease at the University of London Institute of Child Health. From 1978 he spent 18 years at the Liverpool School of Medicine as a senior clinical lecturer and consultant paediatrician. He helped train Indian doctors, especially paediatricians. In 1994 he became director of the Leeds-based NHS Ethnic Health Unit, which financed health programmes for vulnerable ethnic minorities. From 1999 he became a director of two successive north-western primary health trusts.

He joined the Sentencing Panel in 1999 and made a significant contribution to the Commission on the Future of Multicultural Britain, which reported in 2000. In 2001 he became a ‘people’s peer’, and the House of Lords’ only peer of Chinese origin. He used the platform to support the NHS, speaking in 2005 in critical support of the new government’s health programme, warning against inadequate MRSA precautions.
1975
Endorphins discovered.
The morphine-like chemicals in the brain called endorphins are discovered.

1976
The Community Relations Commission, the statutory body set up under the Race Relations Act 1968 and the predecessor of the Commission for Racial Equality, produces the first major report on doctors from overseas. The Commission finds that overseas doctors are:

- over-represented in the lower grades and under-represented at the higher levels of the service
- over-represented in the least popular specialities, which also are the main areas where a few of them are permitted to reach higher level jobs
- less represented in pleasant rural areas
- under-represented in teaching hospitals and academic units

1978
Louise Brown is the world’s first baby to be born as a result of in-vitro fertilisation.

Labour government cuts public spending on NHS.

Gulab Singh MBE
Gulab joined the NHS in 1975 and has since worked with both national and regional bodies for policy and strategy development incorporating equality and diversity. In 1999 Gulab joined the Department of Health Inequalities team. He has served on three North West NHS Regional Executive Task Forces - Food and Health, Oral Health and BME Communities.

Gulab has over 30 years experience in the voluntary sector relating to community development, engagement and cohesion. In 1999 he received his MBE for services to the NHS and Voluntary Sector.

Gulab is currently the Head of Public Health Planning in Central Lancashire PCT.

Beverley Nwosu
British born Beverly trained as a Registered Nurse in Nigeria in 1976, then a midwife in 1981. She worked a short time in Nigeria then emigrated back to the UK and began working in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Beverly joined Whiston Hospital in 1992 as Theatre Sister and then progressed to become Sterile Services Manager.

During her NHS career, Beverly has enjoyed working with a number of GP practices as a Practice Nurse. She has supported the Black Staff Network in the NHS for a number of years and has recently taken the pivotal position of Vice Chair.

Beverly’s current role is Community Matron which sees her supporting care homes with the holistic care of the patient and with chronic disease management.

Scientists report using bacteria in a lab to make insulin.

Scientists identify a previously unknown bacterium as the cause of the mysterious Legionnaires’ disease.

First successful heart transplant
1979

The first successful bone marrow transplant on a child takes place.

Conservative government elected, and will remain in power until 1997. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rejects the ‘collectivist’ view, replacing it with the ‘individualist’ view. It is the individual’s responsibility to look after his/her own health.

Lena Hunt was born in St Kitts and educated at the Senior Girls High School. Having left school at 16, in 1948, aged only 16, she came to England by ship to train as a nurse at Redhill Hospital, Surrey. Once qualified, she held various nursing posts, working in orthopaedic wards and outpatients’ departments. She retired from nursing in 1992. Her two daughters have both followed her into nursing.

“We moved to Runcorn, Cheshire in 1979. I did ‘bank’ work in two or three hospitals in Chester, but then I got a permanent part-time job at Halton General Hospital outpatients’ department, where I stayed until I retired in 1992. It was a very positive experience. Many times, like many others, I would say I was going to give it up and never be a nurse again, but I never did, and always came back to it somehow. With reference to the many nurses of different nationalities who staff our hospitals nowadays – it was ever thus.’

“While I was in Harrow, I remember the nurses’ dining-room had small tables which seated four. There were hardly ever two nurses of the same nationality at any one table. There were nurses from Greece, Nigeria, Java, Ireland, Germany, Sierra Leone as well as the Caribbean.”

1980

Keyhole surgery introduced, used first for the removal of a gall bladder. It goes on to be one of the most common uses of this kind of surgery.

Black Report published providing evidence of health inequalities between rich and poor. Conservatives reject Black’s view that the government should take responsibility for this health gap. The Whitehead Report in 1987 and the Acheson report in 1998 reached the same conclusions as the Black Report.

Siburnie Ramharry was born in Guyana and after leaving high school, worked as a laboratory assistant. In 1962, aged 19, she left Guyana for Scotland to train as a dietician. She trained in Edinburgh and qualified in 1966, becoming first a basic grade dietician, and later a nutritionist, building up experience in the UK and the Caribbean. In 1980 she became dietetic manager with Liverpool Health Authority and in 1988 became manager of the Charing Cross and Westminster group of hospitals. From 1993 she was a senior primary care dietician with East Elmbridge Mid-Surrey Primary Care Trust.

Siburnie was working at St Mary’s Hospital, Paddington when she felt the time had come to move up. ‘I applied for various jobs and one very nice dietician who worked at St George’s said, “Why are you applying for a senior job? You’re really more experienced than this” When I said that I had been abroad and I didn’t really know what I should be aiming for, she invited me for a chat with her and suggested that with my experience in Bermuda I could now apply for manager’s jobs.

‘A job came up with the Liverpool Health Authority as a dietetic manager and I was successful in getting it. They wanted someone to build up their community services. I really enjoyed it. You arrive in Liverpool from Bermuda thinking, ‘What am I doing here – I can’t even understand their accents!’ I think somebody asked, “Why did you apply for the job in Liverpool?” and I said, “Because that’s where the Beatles came from, so it can’t be all bad!”

‘I really loved it there and it was quite a large area to cover. I started in 1980 and was there for about eight years.’

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‘I really loved it there and it was quite a large area to cover. I started in 1980 and was there for about eight years.’
The 1981 Census shows that 11 babies in every 1,000 die before the age of one. In 1900 this figure was 160.

1982
Major strike by nurses over low pay.

Falklands War begins: Argentina invades the Falkland Islands.

Umesh Prabhu
Role: Consultant Paediatrician
Location: Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Born in: Bangalore, India
Start date: 1982

There are 144,000 doctors working in the NHS, out of those nearly 50,000 are overseas qualified whilst 30,000 doctors are from the Indian sub-continent. I feel that those doctors have contributed tremendously to the NHS and I am very proud to be part of that.

Sandra Sumner
Role: Analytical Services Manager
Location: Sefton Primary Care Trust
Born in: UK, parents in Barbados
Start date: 1986

The contribution I have made to the NHS is that I have helped to break down some of the stereotypes and myths that people have about people from Black, Minority and Ethnic groups. I have demonstrated that I have the skills and am able to play a part within the NHS.

Carol Forrester began her NHS career in 1983 as Clerical Officer within the Health Records Department at the Christie Hospital in Manchester. In 1987 she undertook a Medical Secretarial Course and was then promoted to Medical Secretary working within the Endocrinology department.

Wanting to change careers and broaden her knowledge in 1999 Carol transferred to the Performance Management department where she trained as an Administrator. In 2006, Carol took a secondment to the Human Resources department working with the Agenda for Change team and from there took the permanent role of HR Administrator. Carol is working hard to fulfil her life long ambition of becoming a HR Adviser.

Abbas Rashid has been employed at the Cardiothoracic Centre, Liverpool NHS Trust, since 1981. His role is Consultant Cardiac Surgeon and he is the Trust lead in thoracic aneurysm surgery. In 1997, Mr Rashid hosted an international showcase on the management of aortic aneurysm, which brought together both national and international experts to discuss relevant and contemporary reviews of the latest developments in the field.

Mr Rashid has been instrumental in the service development scheme for the treatment of aneurysms of the aorta and is very well respected for his knowledge and expertise.

Channel 4, the fourth terrestrial television channel, is launched in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

1983
Conservative policies reflect their belief that the NHS should be run ‘more like a business.’

1986
The government launches the biggest public health campaign in history to educate people about the threat of AIDS as a result of HIV. This is very much in keeping of the NHS original concept that it should improve health and prevent disease, rather than just offer treatment.

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1988

Comprehensive national breast-screening programme introduced.

Screening, together with improved drug therapies, will help to cut breast cancer deaths by more than 20%.


Richard is a qualified Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) and Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) practitioner as well as a Bronze Commander and in 2003 he founded the Rossendale Community First Responder Group and has acted as its Supporting Paramedic since. He has also completed a four-year secondment as a Fight Paramedic with the North West Air Ambulance Service based at Blackpool Airport. Richard also works with the Trust’s Commercial Training Department as a Work based Trainer.

Richard is of mixed race, White English and Black African-Caribbean and is currently employed by the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust as Operations Supervisor. This role sees Richard responsible for the supervisory management of a team of A&E ambulance staff within East Lancashire.

1991

Fifty-seven NHS trusts are set up to make the service more responsive to the user at a local level. New NHS Trusts encourage creativity and innovation and challenge the domination of the hospitals within a health service that is increasingly focused on services in the community.

The Tiananmen Square massacre takes place in Beijing and the final stand-off is covered live on television.

1987

First heart, lung, and liver transplant is carried out at Papworth Hospital.

Fall of the Berlin Wall. Communist-controlled East Germany opens checkpoints in the Berlin Wall allowing its citizens to travel to West Germany.

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NHS and Community Care Act: internal market is introduced, which means health authorities manage their own budgets and buy healthcare from hospitals and other health organisations. In order to be deemed a “provider” of such healthcare, organisations become NHS Trusts, that is, independent organisations with their own managements.

Shahida Hanif started work for the NHS in 1988 and has since been a nurse, a midwife and a health visitor. During her time she has helped form many BME voluntary organisations and has developed public health initiatives with joint partners and local BME communities, aimed at improving health.

Shahida won the Mary Seacole Development Award in 2004 and has recently helped a team win the Shared Leadership Award for BME Communities in Blackburn with Darwen.

At present, Shahida is working as a Public Health Nurse at both strategic and grassroots level for Blackburn with Darwen Teaching Primary Care Trust.

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Sky Television plc is launched in Europe.
The Conservative government introduces the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). This means a big role for private companies in building new hospitals in NHS.

1993

National register for organ donation is set up to co-ordinate supply and demand after a five-year campaign.

1994

The World Health Organisation declares Tuberculosis a Global Emergency.

1993

Umesh Patel
Role: Head of Medicines Management
Location: Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust
Born in: UK, parents in Gujarat, India and Nairobi, Kenya
Start date: 1993

I actively enjoy the challenges, and every day there is a different challenge. I am allowed to be creative in finding solutions for my Board and Executive and that is the best part of the job.

1997

New Labour elected with Tony Blair as Prime Minister, promising to abolish the internal market and make the NHS ‘once more the envy of the world’. This is to be done by a combination of the ‘collectivist’ and ‘individualist’ approaches, known as ‘the third way.’

1998

The World Health Organisation declares Tuberculosis a Global Emergency.

1998

The Channel Tunnel opens forming a rail link between England and France.

1994

Taher Ali Qassim MBE
Role: Public Health Neighbourhood Management
Location: Liverpool Primary Care Trust
Born in: Yemen
Start date: 1995

If there is anything to change in the NHS it is to have a better understanding about prevention. We all need the hospital when we get sick, but the hospital should focus more on prevention rather than cure.

1998

NHS Direct launches. The service goes on to become one of the largest single e-health services in the world, handling more than half a million calls each month. It is the start of a growing range of convenient alternatives to traditional GP services.
Yunus Mogra
Equality and Diversity Lead Coordinator, North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Yunus was born a British Indian in Malawi, Africa and has been working within the NHS since 2001, specialising in the field of equality and diversity. Throughout his seven years he has worked in learning disability services in Lancashire, acute services in West Yorkshire and is currently at the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust. Yunus has trained over 2,000 different NHS staff in equality and diversity and is the Chair of the East Lancashire Diversity Partnership which comprises partners from the police, fire service, councils and NHS organisations as well as community and voluntary organisations.

He has recently been involved in a national pilot project known as ‘Safe Driving’. This is aimed at reducing the fatalities in car accidents of Black and Minority Asian males aged 19 to 25.

Sefton Simpson
Patient and Public Involvement Officer, Manchester Primary Care Trust

Sefton joined Central Manchester PCT as a Community Health Development Worker in December 2002 following his role as a Project Worker at Community Health and Resources Centre. He then moved to South Manchester PCT in September 2004, to become a Patient and Public Involvement officer and took on a city-wide role in this post following the PCT merger.

Sefton has developed new ways of working with communities to meet Public Health targets and identify the health needs of communities, as well as the barriers. Sefton helped develop South Manchester’s Health Panel and has also trained PCT staff and external stakeholders in patient and public involvement as well as customer care. He has supported the development of effective services through the engagement of patients, the public and communities.

2000

NHS Walk-In Centres: new health facilities open offering convenient access, round-the-clock, 365 days a year.

Labour abolishes the internal market. Hospitals and doctors should ‘co-operate, not compete.’

2002

Primary care trusts are set up to improve the administration and delivery of healthcare at a local level. The trusts oversee 29,000 GPs and 21,000 NHS dentists. Primary care trusts are in charge of vaccination administration and control of epidemics. They control 80 per cent of the total NHS budget. They also liaise with the private sector when contracting out of services is required.

The Labour Government introduces the Private Public Partnership (PPP) to build new hospitals. This replaces the Conservatives’ PFI.
2004

Patient Choice Pilots: all patients waiting longer than six months for an operation are given a choice of an alternative place of treatment. Everyone who is referred by their doctor for hospital treatment is given a choice of at least four hospitals.

The NHS continues to recruit specific staff from overseas. 2004-2005, for example, saw recruitment campaigns for dentists from India and Poland, GPs from Spain and Italy, and psychiatrists and nurses from India.

Angela Aitken

Role: Health Trainer Service Manager
Location: Public Health Department, Heywood, Middleton, Rochdale Primary Care Trust
Born in: UK, parents in St Catherine and Portland Jamaica
Start date: 2004

“My contribution is developing a service which teaches local people to improve their health and by taking the service to those people who need it most. We do this by going into communities where we know people need to improve their health and provide them with one to one behaviour support in order to improve their long term health.”

Parveen Ramzan
Postnatal Advocacy Worker, Blackburn with Darwen Teaching PCT

Parveen has been employed by the NHS since 2006 as a Postnatal Advocacy Worker. In her role she helps BME women who are suffering from postnatal depression. She also works as a Link Worker and has helped many BME women to access maternity services. She helps BME women to overcome the communication problems when they are dealing with the NHS.

Parveen is also Chair of a volunteer group called ‘Women in Health’. The group helps women gain vital personal development skills and so access job opportunities within the NHS. The group members work on many health projects with NHS professionals.

2007

Robotic intervention: introduction of robotic arm leads to groundbreaking operations to treat patients for fast or irregular heartbeats.

2008

The percentage of Black and Ethnic Minority staff in the NHS workforce in the North West is the same as in the wider population. However, BME staff are not represented at all levels in the workforce. NHS North West is working towards representation at all levels and in all professional groups.

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Mei Yu Chan
Physiotherapist, Manchester Primary Care Trust

Mei has worked for the NHS since May 2004, having trained and worked in Hong Kong. Since arriving in England Mei has had to learn to communicate in a second language, often about complex and emotional problems and has also had to quickly learn to deal with many governance issues were not applicable in Hong Kong.

Mei is extremely proactive in referring patients on to other services and discussing the management of children with complex needs with community paediatricians. Mei is also a clinical educator, and prepares and presents in-service training to her team members.