



Professor Frances Wong conducting a nursing round in a hospital in Guangzhou

Pioneer of nursing reforms: an interview with Professor Frances Wong

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Professor Frances Kam-yuet Wong's warm smile and friendliness were what first caught our attention. Bringing along some cinnamon tea she bought from the United States, she openly offered to make us tea, as she guided us through her life story of working beyond the call of her duty as a nursing profession. Charged with a passion to serve the community Prof Wong, President of the Hong Kong Academy of Nursing (HKAN), described her determination to embark on a journey to lobby for better patient care through advocating for policy changes and leading spear-headed changes to introduce multidisciplinary care into the Hong Kong community. Hers is a story that echoes her belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Humble beginnings

The humanitarian aspect of medical care touched her heart. After graduation and assuming the role of a registered nurse, Prof Wong had a renewed sense to directly touch the lives of others. This motivated her to spend her weekends visiting refugee camps in Kowloon City. By helping in the clinics, she was able to provide valuable help that these clinics depended on by assisting in essential procedures that were in heavy demand. With a motivation to lend a helping hand wherever it was welcomed, she also regularly visited children with intellectual disabilities. Prof Wong recounts a particularly memorable time during her time as a young nurse when she was able to share a unique and deep bond with her long-term patients in the intensive care and renal wards. With in-depth conversations made with every decision, a naturally close rapport was built between them. She was deeply touched when she was invited to the funerals of her dear patients.

Positive impact on Hong Kong's nursing profession

Unlike their medical counterparts, nursing specialists in Hong Kong previously did not have any registries or accreditation systems. That began to change in October 2011, when HKAN was established, with the aim to strive for regulation of advanced nursing practice and to accredit nurse specialists on par with international standards. Prof Wong played a pivotal role in the establishment of the HKAN, and her mission now is to achieve statutory status and gain legal protection for nurse specialists in Hong Kong so that the public is protected by safe professional practice. Prof Wong's diverse background and extensive clinical experience guide her to lead the fight for the rights of nurses. Prof Wong is a key player in HKAN's efforts to regulate advanced nursing practice. In large part as a result of her efforts, numerous nurses in mainland China have received an internationally recognised accreditation status, and it is hoped that this system can achieve statutory status in Hong Kong. This system would provide legal protection for specialist nurses and enhance healthcare services provided to the community by ensuring that safe, professional nursing care is provided to all patients. Not only does Prof Wong approach her daily work with an incredible amount of passion, she has also always taken the initiative to go the extra mile for example by working with the underprivileged on her days off during her time as a practising nurse, and more recently through lobbying and advocacy for policy changes that will improve patient care. Prof Wong serves as an exemplary model of how healthcare professionals should approach their work.

Community-based interdisciplinary healthcare support

“Hong Kong has medical services but not healthcare services.” These words from an American professor gave Prof Wong pause for thought. During her research in transitional care from hospital to community, Prof Wong realised that the inadequacy of post-discharge community healthcare leads to high readmission rates and increases the burden of Hong Kong’s healthcare system. This led her to the idea of community-based health centres, which consist of interdisciplinary healthcare professionals such as nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and counsellors. Together, the team help to solve underlying social problems that contribute to health problems, so that the public can receive community-based support. The government-funded pioneer district health centre will be established in Kwai Tsing district, with hopes to enhance the public’s awareness of disease prevention and to provide support for the chronically ill. As a member of the Steering Committees on Primary Healthcare Development and Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Prof Wong envisions the progressive participation of other districts and the involvement of the whole Hong Kong population. She hopes that ultimately, more and more citizens will take an active role to manage their

own health instead of solely relying on healthcare professionals.

Inspiration and drive

Prof Wong describes nursing as a calling, saying, “I did not choose nursing, but nursing chose me”. Since the early days of her career, when she decided to pursue nursing instead of a Sociology degree, Prof Wong has always found the job to be incredibly rewarding. She feels privileged to be trusted by patients and is grateful for the opportunity to accompany them on their journeys. This immense job satisfaction drives Prof Wong to further her career as a nurse, and also to advance the profession as a whole. Along the way, she has met many inspirational figures, whose passion for the profession and for the care of patients she greatly admires. They include professors who taught her in nursing school and numerous members of the HKAN.

Parting words

To draw our interview to a conclusion, Prof Wong offered a few words of advice for both healthcare providers and the public. To healthcare professionals, she says, “Follow your passions, as this will be better for both yourself and your patients.” In general terms, she also advises everyone to, “Take more responsibility for your own health, and remember to practice self-care.”



Professor Frances Wong (second from left) was interviewed by the journal's student reporters (from left): Joey, Venice and Hilary