

Sister Nontando Duma reflects on a nearly 50-year journey as a nurse and educator



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Nontando Duma, who was born in Inanda near Durban, spent almost half a century of her adult life as a nurse, working in six hospitals and teaching at MUT in its technikon days. She worked as a nurse from 1969 to 2016, doing her formative training at Durban's McCord Hospital where she studied General Nursing. She then went to King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban where she studied Midwifery, and proceeded to do a nursing degree at UNISA.

From a very early stage in her life, Nontando was attracted to the professional look of nursing. "I chose nursing because I had passion for it. I was also motivated by the attitude and behaviour of nurses during the 1960s when nurses were highly professional, and their behaviour and mannerisms spoke volumes about the profession," said Nontando.

During the apartheid years, the scope of work was very limited for black people. Only teaching, the police force, the army, nursing and a few other professions were available to them. For women, the scope was even narrower. Fortunately for Nontando, she preferred nursing and never regretted it. "Once a nurse always a nurse. I loved dealing with the needy, vulnerable, children and elderly people, especially in the community."

Nontando said the highlight of her career was when she was a senior nurse. "That was the time when I had to focus on the end results rather than on procedures. Emphasis was on creativity and flexibility, rather than on uniformity," she said. As a manager, Nontando had to promote ethical responsibilities and moral issues in health care with emphasis on disease prevention through health education. She also had to explain legal aspects and regulations in the health service, and how to use the resources at their disposal. "As part of resource management we had to have a good grasp of the methods of financial services in health care, as well as the theories of micro and macro-economics," said Nontando.

This was a time when everything in the country had the potential to become a political mine field. Nontando understood this, and applied the necessary diplomacy. She said nurses, like everybody else, had to be aware of who was wielding power, and how they had to deal with the situation. "We had to be sensitive to the use of power, understand who had it and who did not, and how power or influence was acquired and lost, and when to use it and not to use it."

Highlighting the varied responsibilities of nurses in a society, Nontando said they are educators of health personnel and health consumers, and are also counsellors – helping clients to choose viable solutions to health problems by assisting them to take informed decisions. She also said that nurses have to play a leadership role, explaining that: "Nurses are role models where they consciously or unconsciously demonstrate behaviour to others who will perform a similar role. Nurses practise an advocacy role based on the principle of humanity. This is based on the principle that clients are unique, and will therefore have a unique relationship with the nurse."

From 1993 to 1998 Nontando taught nursing at MUT while it was still a technikon. She was a senior lecturer, and acted as head of the department. She said some of her students went on to hold senior positions in the nursing profession. She also worked in the UK where she got "satisfaction from working with different