

MAKING IT TO THE REGISTERS

A contemporary social history of the regulation of internationally trained nurses.

This research contributes to the wider project 'Making it to the Registers' which seeks to interrogate the lived dimensions of the regulation of global, migrant healthcare workers in the UK.

Research Team (Making it to the Registers)

I was privileged to work with principal investigator Professor Marie-Andrée Jacob, co-investigator Dr Priyasha Saksena and Research fellow Dr Amrita Limbu throughout this 6-week research project.



INTRODUCTION

This research project aimed to document the history of the registration of internationally-trained nurses in the UK. I planned to collate a timeline as well as utilise primary interviews conducted prior to my joining the project, in order to create a memo outline the experience of nurses and healthcare workers. This memo would then be provided to stage@leeds and petroglyph studios to assist in the beginning stages of outputs that promote the project.

WHAT IS REGISTRATION?

Who gets to become and remain a healthcare worker in the UK? Registration and 'the registers' are the regulatory tools that decide this, and understanding registration can explain how internationally-trained workers are treated in UK healthcare.

OBJECTIVE

Provide insight in to the history of registration of internationally-trained nurses in Britain.

METHODOLOGY

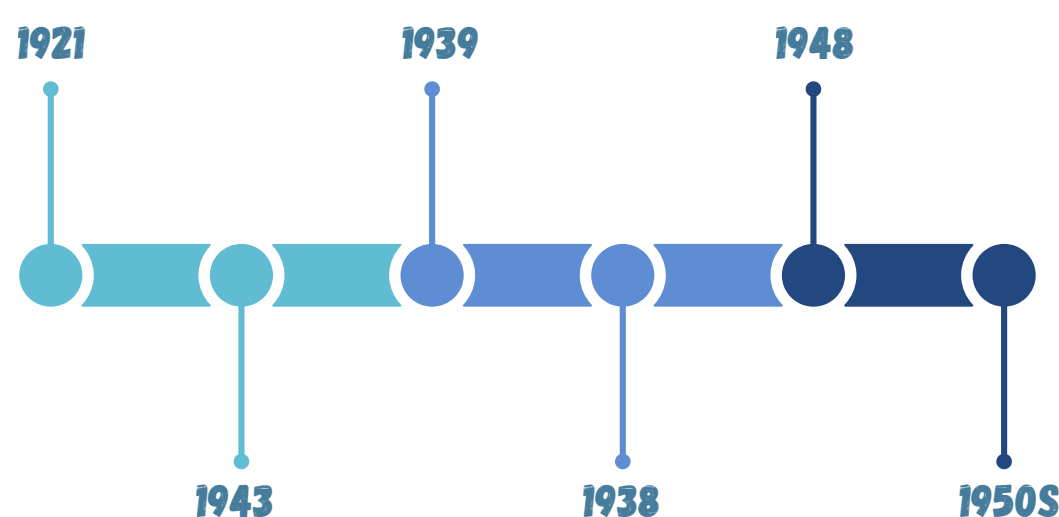
This project was varied in its methodology, and the research began with my attendance at the Migration Matters festival 2024 in Sheffield followed by extensive reading of key texts in the subject area. I utilised resources such as journal articles, documentaries and newspaper archives to begin compiling a historical timeline explaining the process of registration for internationally-trained nurses.

RESULTS

This research allowed for the initial compilation of a timeline explaining key events and changes throughout the history of registration of internationally trained nurses in the UK.

Other outputs from this research include the memo for the dissemination of the wider project, which was largely compiled from the primary interviews. I also produced a blog explaining my observations from the Migration Matters festival, and I was able to produce a blog concerning my own research interest which was published on the Making it to the Registers website titled 'The Challenges of Active Recruitment Policies for the Moroccan Healthcare System'.

In 1921 the nursing register was established. The first person to sign it was Ethel Gordon Fenwick.



The 1950s brought a steady increase of overseas nurses immigrating to the UK, particularly from the Caribbean, many of whom would become part of the Windrush generation.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary aspects of the project, notably the conversations that took place at the Migration Matters festival, highlighted challenges facing refugee and migrant nurses, including English-language exams, qualifications that can't be transferred or accessed as well as the plights of not being able to work as an asylum seeker.

Understanding this amplifies the importance of understanding the history, including the significance of hierarchies like assistant nurses, SENs and SRNs which limited mobility of internationally-trained nurses.

TIMELINE

1921 - Ethel Gordon Fenwick is the first person to sign the nursing register.

1938 - A Ministry of Labour official noted that his department waived responsibility for issuing work permits. Until now there was a 'definite restrictive policy' meaning only 3 per cent of staff were allowed to be foreigners. Permits were not granted to 'aliens' simply to offset shortages in British hospitals.

1939 - Existing nurse shortages are exacerbated by WW2. Refugees were classed as friendly, neutral or enemy aliens. Enemy aliens were brought before a tribunal.

1943 - The Registration for Employment measure meant all persons aged between 17 and 60 who had nursing experience within the last 10 years were expected to register. The 1943 Nurses' Act introduced the concept of 'assistant nurses'.

1948 - The National Health Service (NHS) was established. An active recruitment approach was taken towards international workers. In the late 1940s more British nurses were recruited to the Colonial Nursing Service than during any other period. The rate of registered nurses leaving the UK was higher than overseas nurses entering the UK.

1950s - Nurses immigrate to the UK, particularly from the Caribbean. The concept of state-registered and state-enrolled nurses was established (SEN and SRN) leading to a lack of professional mobility among overseas trained nurses.

Related literature

Doug Haynes' Fit to Practice: Empire Race, Gender and the Making of British medicine 1850-1980

Solano Diana Rafferty Anne Marie, Can lessons be learned from history? The origins of the British imperial nurse labour market: a discussion paper. Int J Nurs Stud. 2007

Virtual exhibition Heart of the Nation, Migration Museum <https://heartofthenation.migrationmuseum.org/>

'You called and we came: Windrush and the NHS' <https://features.kingsfund.org.uk/windrush-and-the-nhs/>