

Spotlight on: Valerie Collins

"IT'S not just about sickness, it's about creating balance in happiness, health, education, relationships, choices and boundaries."

This is how Valerie Collins describes her approach to her role as a registered nurse in intellectual disability (RNID) in adult services with Enable Ireland. She has worked there for 22 years having previously worked for the Cope Foundation for 18 years. During her training years she worked with children, behavioural support units and people with profound and severe mental and physical disabilities. She has great all-round skills in the sector but values her role in adult services where she takes a holistic approach to working with vulnerable adults.

Three of her sisters are general nurses, but Ms Collins is very glad she works in ID services, where she can help to develop the unique potential of people who are vulnerable intellectually, physically and emotionally. This requires a broad spectrum of competencies. She feels that the RNID nurse has the capacity to be a positive influence on the service user's day and that the role requires the nurse to be empathetic, flexible, compassionate and patient. She also says it involves promoting equality and inclusion in all areas of life for the service user.

"We can make someone's day a bit better through our input and interventions. A nurse can make a unique and integral difference in helping service users realise their potential depending on where our strengths lie."

Ms Collins believes that it is important for management to be strong and not lose sight of the role of RNID to avoid demarcation.

"We are advocates for the people in our charge. In some cases, we are their only voice. It is important that we can be assertive within our scope of practice."

Ms Collins feels that it is vital to have nurses in management roles to ensure quality, professional staffing and supervision, and to ensure best practice and



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be involved in decision making. She is concerned by some of the cost saving measures in the sector, which often result in nursing tasks being taken on by health-care workers.

"The role is extensive, and it is important that we use nurses' strengths to maximise the potential of the individuals in our care."

She feels that the RNID has a more holistic role in that they don't just treat sick patients, but also try to bring balance to the service user's life.

As well as being a nurse, Ms Collins has studied complementary therapies for 25 years. She brings her training in reflexology and Shiatsu massage into her role as a nurse, which she says have benefited the people in her care both physically and emotionally, in particular non-verbal and profoundly intellectually challenged service users. In the future she would love to see training in some of these therapies offered to nurses and midwives as part of their continuous professional development.

Ms Collins originally joined the INMO for the further education and information

services it offers, however she has since found that being part of a union provides a great feeling of professional safety in knowing that help and advice, codes of ethics and representation are all available when needed. It helps workers feel less isolated especially in facilities where there is a social model, but no nursing structure.

When asked if anything would make her day-to-day job easier or more efficient, she said: "More nurses on the ground make for a safer and more effective patient care. We simply can't be in two places at once. For example, if I am at a clinical meeting and the level of care on the floor is reduced, I must abandon what I am doing as patient care is our top priority. Having more nursing staff would allow us to do more for the patients in our care and would give us the opportunity to properly document our work."

This article is part of our series on Nursing Now, a global campaign that aims to achieve recognition of nurses' contribution to healthcare, gender equality, the economy and wider society. The campaign's aim is to improve health globally by raising the profile of nurses, influencing policymakers and supporting nurses to lead, learn and build a global movement – www.nursingnowireland.ie