
Press release

Heart of the Nation – exhibition highlights vital role played by migrants in the NHS

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS is a new digital exhibition from the Migration Museum launching today (5 October 2020), shining a light on the stories and experiences of people who have come to Britain to work in the National Health Service (NHS) over the past 72 years.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the NHS in all of our lives and its reliance on people from all over the world. Around a quarter of NHS staff are non-British nationals or from a minority ethnic background, rising to around a third of nurses and health visitors, and almost half of doctors. Many have found themselves working on the frontlines of the Covid-19 pandemic. A disproportionate number have lost their lives.

This is not a new story. Migrants have played a key role in the NHS ever since its creation in 1948. But this story has largely been ignored. And we often know very little about the personal stories of our care givers, or the individual and institutional challenges they face.

Heart of the Nation is a multimedia exhibition that puts this vital story at centre stage through oral histories and archival materials, as well as art, animations and data visualisations. Highlights include:

- Dozens of stories contributed by people who have come from all over the world to work at all levels of the NHS from the 1940s to the present day.
- A newly commissioned animation by visual storyteller Tribambuka, narrated by acclaimed author and poet Michael Rosen who himself was hospitalised during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Artworks by The Singh Twins and EVEWRIGHT.
- Photographs by Charlie Phillips, Chris Porsz and Rankin, alongside personal and archival photos.
- Opportunities for people to submit their stories – to be added to the exhibition on an ongoing basis.

The Migration Museum has worked with Spotify to create a Heart of the Nation playlist, including songs shared with us by NHS workers. The exhibition will be accompanied by a social media campaign, encompassing behind-the-scenes content, conversations with influencers and NHS staff, and opportunities for users to submit stories.

“As the outpouring of affection during the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, the NHS is a source of national pride and is often painted as a distinctly British success story. Yet the NHS simply wouldn’t exist without the generations of people from all over the world who have built, grown and staffed it,” says Aditi Anand, head of creative content at the Migration Museum and curator of the exhibition.

“*Heart of the Nation* highlights the vital role that migrants have always played in the NHS and the extent to which, just like the NHS, migration is central to the very fabric of who we are in Britain – as individuals, as communities and as a nation. Now more than ever, this is a story that needs to be told.”

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS is at: heartofthenation.migrationmuseum.org. A physical display accompanying the exhibition will be launched when the Migration Museum reopens in late October 2020.

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For more information, contact Matthew Plowright: E: matthew@migrationmuseum.org T: +44 (0)7585117924

Notes for editors

Visitor information

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS is a free digital exhibition that can be visited at: heartofthenation.migrationmuseum.org. The exhibition site will be live for at least three years. The Migration Museum will be adding visitor-submitted stories and quotes to the exhibition on an ongoing basis.

The Spotify playlist can be found [here](#).

The accompanying social media campaign will run across the Migration Museum's Instagram, IGTV, Twitter and Facebook channels from October 2020 onwards.

A physical display accompanying the exhibition will be on display at the Migration Museum (Unit 11, Lewisham Shopping Centre, Molesworth Street, London SE13 7HB) when it reopens on 23 October 2020. For more information and opening hours, please visit: migrationmuseum.org/visit. The Migration Museum is planning a physical exhibition and a series of events in 2023 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the creation of the NHS.

About the Migration Museum

The Migration Museum explores how the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we are – as individuals, as communities, and as a nation. Migration is a pressing contemporary issue and is at the centre of polarised political and online debate. But there's an underlying story of comings and goings stretching back many centuries. And this story goes to the heart of who we are today. Britain has thousands of museums, but none comprehensively focused on this important theme that connects us all. The time is right for a highly relevant, accessible visitor attraction that shines a light on who we are, where we come from and where we are going.

From our current home in the heart of Lewisham Shopping Centre, we stage engaging, interactive exhibitions and dynamic events, from stand-up comedy nights to football tournaments, alongside a far-reaching education programme for primary, secondary, university and adult learners. Since mid-March 2020, our outputs have been digital. Our physical museum is reopening in late October 2020. For more information, visit www.migrationmuseum.org

Contributors

Storytellers

Ali Abdi (porter, from Somalia via the Netherlands), Allyson Williams MBE (retired midwife, from Trinidad), Lord Ara Darzi (chair of surgery at Imperial College London and honorary consultant surgeon at St Mary's Hospital, and the Royal Marsden Hospital, from Iraq via Ireland), Dr Bimbi Fernando (transplant surgeon, son of Dr Ossie Fernando), Claudia Anghel (midwife, from Romania), Elia Monteiro (nurse at a GP practice, from Portugal), Dr Elif Ezgi (cardiologist, from Turkey), Ethel Corduff (retired nurse, from Ireland), Eva Loeffler (daughter of Sir Ludwig Guttmann), Gulzar Waljee (retired midwife, from Tanzania), Dr Hargun Khanchandani (GP, from India), Leila Phillips (retired nurse, from Guyana), Dr Lionel Stoll (former GP, from Lithuania), Lotte Fuchs (former nurse, from former Czechoslovakia), Sir Ludwig Guttmann (neurologist, from Upper Silesia, Germany (now Poland)), Lynette Richards-Lorde (retired Nurse, from Guyana), Mae Appleton (retired psychiatric nurse, from the Philippines), Margaret Jaikissoon (nurse, from Trinidad), Mary Otchere (caterer, from Ghana), Mathias Banzi (quality service manager in a care home, from Rwanda), Dr Meenal Viz (doctor in oncology and A&E, from Gibraltar via Czech Republic), Dr Muhayman Jamil (palliative care, from Iraq), Dr Nayyar Naqvi (cardiologist, from Pakistan), Dr Neehal Shah (dentist, from Kenya), Dr Neslyn Watson-Druee (former chair of NHS Trust, from Jamaica), Dr Ngozi Edi-Osagie (neonatologist, from Nigeria), Dr Nitha Naqvi (paediatric cardiologist, daughter of doctors from Pakistan), Dr Ossie Fernando (transplant surgeon, from Sri Lanka), Dr Pearse Keane (ophthalmologist, from Ireland via United States), Petronio Demillo (porter, from the Philippines), Dr Raj Khanchandani (GP, from India), Sarah Jensen (chief information officer at an NHS Trust, from South Korea via the USA), Dr Veena Rao (GP, from India), Yvonne Coghill (vice-president of the Royal College of Nursing, from Guyana).

Artists, photographers, animators and narrators

Charlie Phillips, Chris Porsz, EVEWRIGHT, Michael Rosen, Rankin, The Singh Twins, Tribambuka

Acknowledgments:

We are extremely grateful to everyone who shared their personal stories and experiences with us for the exhibition, to Michael Rosen and Tribambuka, and to NHS England, NHS Digital, NHS at 70, the Royal College of Nursing, Rankin, EVEWRIGHT, Charlie Phillips and Chris Porsz for granting us permission to include content, stories, artwork and data in the exhibition. *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* has been made possible thanks to funding from Alfred Caplin Charitable Settlement, Arts Council England, The Dorfman Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy. We would like to thank Spotify for their support. The exhibition site has been designed and developed by Eight Arms, with additional design and direction by Roland Williams.



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For interview requests, media assets or more information, please contact Matthew Plowright:

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Media assets

Selected exhibition images and stories

Lotte Fuchs, nurse, arrived in 1938 from Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic) (image and story courtesy Nick Fox)



“In 1938 with the situation deteriorating for Jewish people in Europe, my aunt Lotte was sent by her family to study as a nurse in Manchester. She was 17 and came here on her own. She had only been in Britain a few months when she found out that her brother was in the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp. She went and knocked on doors to find someone who would agree to sponsor him so that she could get him out. In my father’s words, ‘she saved my life’.

Later when Britain entered the war, suspicion fell on immigrants and she was forced to leave her job and interrupt her training. She became a children’s nanny for a time. Eventually she was allowed to work again, and she became a nurse for the NHS and then a psychiatric social worker.”

Nayyar Naqvi, cardiologist, arrived from Pakistan in 1968 (image courtesy Nayyar Naqvi)



“I went to Dow Medical College in Karachi. Our education was all in English. Our medical college was based on the British standard. All our teachers had gone to Britain to get their postgraduate qualifications. So all of us wanted to come to Britain.

Those of us who came from India and Pakistan could only get jobs in district general hospitals, which were not as good or sophisticated as they are now. It was virtually impossible for us to get a job in a teaching hospital. And once we became registrars, that was the ceiling. You couldn’t get any higher than that. The applications I sent were rejected just because of my name and where I got my degree. Any interview that I went to, bar one, I got the job. It was a question of getting to the interview stage.”

Mae Appleton, nurse, arrived in 1969 from the Philippines (image courtesy Mae Appleton)



“My friend Tanny and I arrived at Heathrow and had to make our own way to the hospital. We didn’t know anything about England or the currency. When we got to the hospital, we found out that Park Prewett was a psychiatric hospital. We thought it was a general hospital! And Tanny and I looked at each other and thought, ‘we don’t have a clue about psychiatry’. We were both midwives.

We had our own room but we couldn’t sleep because it was very cold. We left the Philippines in the 30s and 40s and we came in here and it was below zero or something like that. I was crying because I couldn’t get warm and then I had to wear socks, pyjamas and a hat and gloves in bed.”

Allyson Williams MBE, midwife, arrived in 1969 from Trinidad (image courtesy Allyson Williams)



“When we worked late on Saturday night and early on Sunday morning, we still went out. We would party all night and return to the nurses’ home about 6am, shower and then go on duty for 7am.

We got dressed up to the hilt when we went out. We often picked clothes for each other. I came with suitcases of clothes that my Mum made for me. My fashion statement was wearing a wig which I set with rollers in different styles. We listened to music all the time, especially when getting ready to go out, as it got us in the party mood.”

Muhayman Jamil, palliative care, arrived in 1990 from Iraq (image courtesy Muhayman Jamil)



“All males in Iraq are conscripted into the army. In 1980, I joined as a junior medical officer. Within one month, Saddam Hussein started the war with Iran. Having had a bit of neurosurgical training, I ended up in a big hospital doing a lot of war neurosurgery – young men who had been shot, shrapnel wounds to the brain. It was very unpleasant, messy work.

The first job I applied for in the UK, I was interviewed by three senior consultant neurosurgeons and they asked me about my previous experience and I was telling them I did trauma neurosurgery in Iraq during the war. They all three went quiet for a minute. And they said: ‘You have more experience in trauma neurosurgery than the three of us put together’. Those were the skills I brought with me from a warzone.”

Selected exhibition artwork and photography

Chris Porsz, Behind the scenes at Peterborough General



“In 1974 I dropped out of my university sociology course to become a hospital porter in Peterborough. Instead of writing long boring essays, I turned my camera on society and colleagues at work.

My mother was a Holocaust survivor so knew exactly what hatred leads to and my images are a tribute to that generation and the sacrifices they have made for us in our NHS.”

The Singh Twins – NHS V Covid-19: Fighting on Two Fronts



“Inspired largely by media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, the work pays tribute to NHS and other frontline healthcare workers. But as artists who see themselves as social political commentators, we also present a satirical look at the government's handling of the crisis, whilst challenging notions of Britishness.”

To arrange interviews with contributors or curators, for more assets, high-res images or more information, please contact:

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