



The Heart of the Nation exhibition features this eye-catching animation by Tribambuka.

People from almost 200 countries work in the NHS



Lotte Fuchs.

Lotte Fuchs

Lotte Fuchs came to the UK in 1938, at the age of just seventeen, to study as a nurse at Booth Hall Children's Hospital in Manchester. Hostility towards the Jewish community was growing in Lotte's native Czechoslovakia at this time, and her Jewish family sent her to the UK as they felt she would have a better life there.

Shortly after arriving in the UK, Lotte discovered that her brother had been taken to a concentration camp in Germany. She knocked on the doors of her new neighbours, looking for someone to sponsor a visa for her brother to allow him to come to the UK.

This ultimately led to her brother's release from the concentration camp and his admission to Britain.

Mairi Hughes learns about the rich diversity of the NHS, and the exhibition dedicated to it.



Exhibition curator Aditi Anand.

THE COVID-19 pandemic has awoken people across the UK to the importance of our National Health Service, and provoked a wave of gratitude for NHS

staff who constantly work hard to nurse our nation.

As the pandemic initially took hold of the country, millions took to their doorsteps weekly to show their appreciation for the NHS, and children paid tribute to NHS workers by decorating windows with home-made rainbows and thank-you messages.

The NHS has been built up over the past 72 years to create the health service we all benefit from today.

However, the NHS would not be what it is without the many members of staff who have come from all over the world to be part of it.

At the Migration Museum in Lewisham,

plans were already underway for an exhibition dedicated to the international diversity of the NHS when the pandemic hit.

When the museum, along with many other establishments across the UK, was forced to close its doors, they had to adapt, and decided to take this exhibition online.

"The NHS is a source of national pride and is often painted as a distinctly British success story," exhibition curator Aditi Anand says.

"Yet the NHS simply wouldn't exist without the generations of people from all over the world who have built, grown and staffed it.

"We wanted to capitalise on this moment and put this vital story centre stage.

"And, as with all of our exhibitions, we wanted to put personal stories and experiences at the heart of the exhibition.

"So we started to gather stories from people who had come to Britain from all over the world, to work at all levels of the NHS since

its creation in 1948."

In October, the Migration Museum launched "Heart Of The Nation: Migration And The Making Of The NHS" as their first ever major digital exhibition.

It brings together and celebrates the stories of many different individuals who have come to Britain to work in the NHS over its

Dr Muhayman Jamil

When Muhayman Jamil graduated from medical school in Baghdad in 1980, he was conscripted into the Iraqi army, where he would stay for five years, working as a junior medical officer.

Muhayman arrived in the UK in 1990 and applied for a hospital training post in neurosurgery. When he was interviewed for the role, his three senior consultant neurosurgeon interviewers told him he had gained more experience working during the war in Iraq than all of them put together.

Muhayman worked as a neurosurgical trainee before taking up palliative medicine in London, which he has now done for 20 years.



Muhayman Jamil.

Mae Appleton

Mae Appleton arrived in the UK from the Philippines in 1969. Mae did not know until she arrived that she would be working in a psychiatric hospital. She was trained as a midwife.

Initially, settling down in England was a shock to the system for Mae, who says she had to wear pyjamas, socks, gloves and a hat to bed, being accustomed to the warm Philippian climate!

Mae's British colleagues had no idea what the Philippines was like, and she said she felt like an ambassador, as people constantly asked her about her native culture.

Mae eventually met her husband here and settled permanently in the UK. For most of her career she worked on a geriatric psychiatric ward.



Mae Appleton.

Mae Appleton.

72-year history.

"We wanted to represent the full diversity of the NHS in the stories we included," Aditi adds, "in terms of their nationality, ages and roles.

"People from almost 200 countries work in the NHS, yet we don't often hear stories reflecting this."

Today, roughly a quarter of NHS staff are not British nationals.

During the pandemic, we were perhaps more aware than ever of the contribution of black, Asian and minority ethnic workers within the NHS, as these groups were disproportionately affected by higher mortality and morbidity rates.

Despite this heroic contribution to our NHS, the rich diversity of the health service is something which isn't often celebrated.

This exhibition invited migrants to the UK working within the NHS to share their stories, with over 30 currently on display.

"I was struck by the sheer

diversity of roles within the NHS," Aditi says, "and the many ways in which migrants have made an impact at all levels of the British healthcare system throughout its history.

"Right from the beginning, people have come to Britain from all over the world to make this grand vision for a better society a reality.

"Working on this exhibition has also been an opportunity to learn about people's multi-faceted lives – not just as doctors or nurses, porters or cleaners, but as human beings.

"Many have overcome deeply personal challenges – such as escaping a war zone or suffering through the Partition of India – and have had a lasting impact on their communities outside of work." ■

Travel restrictions may still be in place. Please check latest advice before planning your trip.

If you want to see the exhibition for yourself, you can view it online at www.heartofthenation.co.uk.

The exhibition also has a physical element on display at the museum, which you can visit at Lewisham Shopping Centre, Molesworth Street, Lewisham, London SE13 7HB.

The museum is still inviting people to share any NHS migration stories they have, which they are continuing to add to the exhibition. You can submit stories at www.migrationmuseum.org