
Press release

Exhibition highlights vital role played by migrants in the NHS during 75th anniversary year



The Migration Museum is opening [Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS](#), a national touring exhibition to mark the 75th anniversary year of the National Health Service (NHS), in Lewisham, south London, on 7 March 2024.

The NHS has faced huge pressures over the decades – never more so than today. Yet the NHS and the millions of people who sustain it remain close to our hearts. And without its international workers, the NHS would not have become the beloved institution it is today.

Ever since its creation in 1948, people have come to Britain from all over the world to make this grand vision for a better society a reality. Today, around 1 in 6 people working in the NHS has a non-British nationality. And many others are the children and grandchildren of migrant healthcare workers, forging multi-generational legacies. But their crucial role has largely been ignored.

NHS workers care for us from the moment we're born, until the moment we die. *Heart of the Nation* is an immersive media exhibition that asks the question: who are the people who care for us? And do we care enough?

Featuring dozens of personal 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, alongside photography, film, newly commissioned artwork, unique artefacts and historical ephemera, *Heart of the Nation* shares the stories and experiences of the migrant healthcare workers who built and have sustained our health service.

The exhibition features stories of Lewisham- and London-based NHS workers alongside people from around the world working in the NHS across the UK. Featured stories include Kui Eng (Doris) Lau, who moved from Malaysia to train in general nursing at Lewisham Hospital in 1966; Dr Muhayman Jamil, who arrived in the UK from Iraq in 1990, trained as a neurosurgeon and then moved into palliative care; and Allyson Williams MBE, who moved to London from Trinidad in 1969 to train as a nurse at the Whittington Hospital, became a midwife and went on to found the legendary Notting Hill Carnival Mas band Genesis with her husband Vernon.

The centre-piece of the exhibition is SPEAK, a newly commissioned interactive music and video installation co-created and performed by seven people currently working in the NHS, exploring themes of care through singing and storytelling.

Visitors will finish in an interactive healing space, where they'll be invited to reflect on and share their stories and experiences of care, and add messages for NHS workers who have cared for them throughout their lives to an evolving participatory installation.

The exhibition builds on a digital exhibition that the Migration Museum launched during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which has been updated and integrated into the new exhibition. Visitors will also be able to contribute their own stories to this evolving, participatory exhibition.

Aditi Anand, Artistic Director at the Migration Museum, said: "For all its challenges, the NHS remains an immense 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.

"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 – and we're delighted to be able to bring this exhibition to our current home in Lewisham."

Dr Adil Akram, a psychiatrist working in the NHS who is one of the singers and co-creators of the music and video installation, said: "My father came over from Pakistan in the 1960s to practise as a doctor in the NHS – and I've followed in his footsteps. This exhibition is close to my heart – it's about the contributions of people like my father who came to this country and spent their lives and careers helping to build the NHS into the fantastic institution it is today, that symbolises all the good things about the UK."

The exhibition opens at the Migration Museum's current venue in Lewisham Shopping Centre on 7 March and runs until 27 July 2024, the final leg of a national tour. The exhibition launched in Leicester in June 2023 before moving to Leeds in November 2023.

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Notes for editors

Where and when

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS opens to the public at the Migration Museum in Lewisham, south London, on 7 March 2024. The exhibition will be open to the public until 27 July 2024.

The exhibition can also be explored online at: www.heartofthenation.co.uk.

Opening hours and admission

The Migration Museum is open to the public on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, from 11am until 5.30pm.

Admission free – no booking.

Address

Migration Museum
Lewisham Shopping Centre (Central Square)
London SE13 7HB

For more visitor information, please visit: <https://www.migrationmuseum.org/visit/>

Website and social media

Website: www.migrationmuseum.org

Instagram: [@MigrationMuseumUK](https://www.instagram.com/MigrationMuseumUK)

Twitter: [@MigrationUK](https://twitter.com/MigrationUK)

Facebook: [MigrationMuseumUK](https://www.facebook.com/MigrationMuseumUK)

Hashtag: #HeartoftheNation

Media images

A selection of media images can be found [here](#).

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About the Migration Museum

The Migration Museum explores how the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we all are – as individuals, as communities and as nations.

We stage interactive, story-led exhibitions and a wide range of events, alongside high-profile digital campaigns and an education programme delivering workshops to thousands of young people each year and reaching millions more across the country via teacher training and partnerships. We also convene a knowledge-sharing Migration Network of museums and galleries across the UK.

Since 2020, the Migration Museum has been based in a dynamic temporary venue in a busy shopping centre in Lewisham, south-east London. From November 2023 until February 2024, the Migration Museum also operated a pop-up museum in Trinity Leeds.

After a 10-year journey, the Migration Museum has been given the green light for a new permanent home in the City of London, close to Aldgate and the Tower of London. Our new, much larger museum, which we hope to open in 2027, will encompass interactive temporary and permanent exhibition galleries, a flexible learning suite and event space, outdoor areas, a cafe/restaurant and shop, enabling us to deliver a wide programme of events, activities, training and volunteering opportunities. Our plans also include a network of venues across the UK and a new digital storytelling hub.

In the meantime, we are delighted to be able to remain in our current temporary venue in Lewisham for at least another two years.

Find out more at: migrationmuseum.org

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Lead image: Photo © Roy Mehta