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## OPINION PIECE

### **International Nurses Day: Nurses continue to hold the front line in the fight for global health, says UP Nursing Professor**

*By Professor Shirley Mogale, Associate Professor in the Department of Nursing at the University of Pretoria.  
12 May is International Nurses Day, and 2020 is the Year of the Nurse and Midwife,  
as declared by the World Health Organization.*

As the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems prescient that, in early 2019, the World Health Organization declared 2020 the Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

The intention of both the Year of the Nurse and Midwife and International Nurses Day (commemorated on 12 May annually) was to bring to light the profound impact that nurses and midwives have on the daily lives of the public. Nobody could have predicted that events seen so far in 2020 would so amplify and highlight the role nurses play across the globe.

Since its conception, nursing has been known to be both a science and an art. The history of nursing tells us that 2020 is also the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the first nurse scientist, who initiated the evolution of nursing. Thanks to her efforts, nurse scientists delved into the depths of science to position nursing as a profession. Now, across the globe, the nursing profession is rooted in its duty to humanity, as endorsed by the Nurses' Pledge of Service.

Closer to home, nursing in South Africa is guided by the philosophical beacons of light that form the **core principles** of nursing. Pioneered by Professor Charlotte Searle, these beacons outline the myriad of values that guide nursing activities and their service to humankind. According to these beacons, nursing is:

- **A belief that nurses are charged with responsibility for themselves and their patients;**
- **Faith for inner strength** to help them in their work;
- **A yearning** to be a worthy servant of humanity;
- Acceptance of the **uniqueness of each human being and their health needs;**
- **Transcending the nurse-patient relationship** to one between human beings;
- **Conservation of human life through change;**
- **Assistance and support** to both patients and those rendering care;
- **The use of scientific skills** in provision of care;
- **Therapeutic use of the self**, as it is love made visible.

Throughout the ages, nurses and midwives have been on the front line coming up with practical solutions to solve real and relevant health problems. The trend traces back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Crimean War, when a nurse advocated for basic sanitary practices to underscore medical assistance to injured soldiers.

We can trace through history how these extraordinary people with extraordinary skills have and continue to improve patient care and health outcomes. During the 1939 polio outbreak, again it was a nurse who recommended that movement and physical therapy be integrated into the management of the disease.

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During the recent Ebola outbreak, a nurse used what was at hand to protect herself while taking care of those infected. The list can go on and on about what nurses and midwives are capable of as the backbone of our healthcare system.

We know and believe that nurses and midwives change lives on a daily basis.

In this time of uncertainty, nurses will continue to hold the front line as members of transdisciplinary teams around the world coming up with fast-paced responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Transdisciplinarity in healthcare provision has never been more important than right now. Through collective resilience and adaptability humankind will survive the pandemic as we forge ahead into the unknown. Through inclusive responses that put people first, teams will collaborate to defeat this life-threatening disease. Collaboratively, as nurses and the members of strong transdisciplinary teams, let us preach the means and ways to flatten the COVID-19 curve.

Despite the uncertainty we face globally let us celebrate **the Year of the Nurse and Midwife** with hope and pride.

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### **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to

maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition, UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

For more information, go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)