

In the beginning: Florence Nightingale

In early nineteenth century Britain, the nursing profession was viewed with derision. Hospitals were seen as filthy, dangerous places, and nurses as unsavoury characters.

One woman, Florence Nightingale was determined to change this perception.

In 1853, when British health care proved inadequate during the Crimean War (1853-56), Nightingale volunteered her services. Over the course of the four-year war, Nightingale led hospital staff in caring for thousands of wounded and sick soldiers.

When Nightingale and 38 British nurses arrived in the Crimea, conditions were much worse than they had anticipated. Infection was rife and stores had either not arrived or had been [lost at sea](#). Nightingale immediately recognised that the hospitals needed to be properly managed and often worked 20 hour days to achieve this. She was the first to recognise the connection between a patient's mental and physical wellbeing. At night Nightingale would walk the hospital corridors, caring for her patients. She was given the affectionate nickname, "The Lady with the Lamp".

After returning to Britain, Nightingale demanded a Royal Commission into the Military Hospitals and the health of the army. Money donated by the general public was used to establish the first organised training school for nurses, the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas' Hospital, London.

In her later life Nightingale researched, campaigned and wrote over 200 reports, pamphlets and books on nursing, hospital organisation and health reform, which had a profound effect in Britain and across the world.

Florence Nightingale's ideas on nursing were ahead of her time and changed society's approach to nursing for ever. She was a visionary health reformer, introducing a holistic approach to nursing and promoting commitment to patient care. Perhaps Nightingale's greatest achievement was to take the first step in making nursing a respectable profession for women.



Florence Nightingale Medal posthumously awarded to Matron Olive Paschke, 2/10th Australian General Hospital. Paschke drowned, along with 32 other Australian nurses, when the Vyner Brooke was sunk by Japanese bombers in the Banka Strait on 14 February 1942. AWM [REL25108.006](#)

In 1907 the Hungarian Red Cross Society proposed that a world tribute be paid to Florence Nightingale in the form of a special medal for women who distinguished themselves in the noble mission of caring for the sick and wounded.

Over 40 Australian nurses have received the Florence Nightingale medal.

In 1992, the International Committee of the Red Cross changed the criteria for awarding the Florence Nightingale Medal so that both male and female nurses would be eligible. The award is now open to qualified nurses and voluntary nursing aides who are active members or regular helpers of a national Red Cross organisation or an affiliated medical or nursing institution.

Activity

Research one of the following Australian nurses who have been awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal: Matron Olive Paschke, Sister Evelyn Conyers, Captain Vivian Bullwinkel or Barbara Moriarty.

- i) Why were they awarded this medal?
- ii) How do their actions reflect the work of Florence Nightingale?

For more information

Vivian Bullwinkel <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/1906.asp>
Nurses exhibition: <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/nurses/introduction/>
Search for a person <https://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/>
Roll of Honour: http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll_of_honour/index.asp,
First world war nominal roll: http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war/
First world war embarkation roll:
http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war_embarkation/
Family history <https://www.awm.gov.au/research/family/>
Brief essays and lots of links about major conflicts <https://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/>
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/florence-nightingale-medal-interview-110810.htm>
<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/crimea/florrie.html>
<http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk/cms/index.php/florence-introduction>

This document is available on the Australian War Memorial's website at <http://www.awm.gov.au/education/resources/nurses>

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