

Media Release

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EMPOWERING DEMENTIA CARE: STATE HOSPITAL PROJECT WINS PRESTIGIOUS RCN SCOTLAND AWARD



The State Hospital, in collaboration with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has scooped a prestigious Royal College of Nursing Nurse of the Year Award.

The Learning in Practice Award recognises the team's innovative work in enhancing dementia care in forensic mental health services.

The award was presented for the Triple Jeopardy project, which has already gained national recognition and has been shortlisted for multiple nursing awards.

The programme, which empowered 26 staff members at the State Hospital to deliver high-quality, dementia-specific care, was developed in conjunction with experts from UWS's Alzheimer Scotland Centre for Policy and Practice (ASCPP).

Laura Young, Senior Nurse, Nursing Practice Development at the State Hospital and a former lecturer in Mental Health at UWS, initiated the collaboration by contacting UWS colleagues for dementia-specific training.

After collecting the Award, she said: "We were absolutely thrilled to receive this accolade - and very proud. It has been an incredible honour to have won this award, which is amazing recognition for everyone involved."

The project first began when Mark McGeehan, a Senior Charge Nurse at the State Hospital approached Laura regarding training for the team. The State Hospital had a small number of patients who were living with dementia, and a staff group who were really motivated to improve their care as much as possible, but who needed specific expert-dementia education.

It was led by Laura, in collaboration with colleagues from both organisations. Mark, now retired Deputy Director of the ASCPP Dr Margaret Brown, Dr Anna Jack-Waugh and Dr Eileen Harkess-Murphey from UWS worked together, co-designing, delivering and researching the impact of the project. Consultant Nurse Dr Helen Walker from the School of Forensic Mental Health supported the evaluation.

The bespoke package, covering a range of topics including the prevalence of dementia, different types of dementia and the impact of the condition on daily living, was specifically for forensic nursing staff, focusing on experiential learning around communication, personhood, and responsive care. The result? Stronger staff-patient relationships and more person-centred, needs-led care.

Laura said: "Our nurses are extraordinary, dedicated and diligent. Their commitment has not only advanced this initiative but has significantly improved the quality of care for our patients in a high-secure setting. Their efforts have ensured that our patients receive compassionate, specialist care, which is vital in such a challenging environment."

Now, three years on, the positive impact of this initiative continues to be felt in practice - and it is gaining attention for potential wider implementation across Scotland.

Karen McCaffrey, Director of Nursing and Operations at the State Hospital, praised the team. "I am absolutely delighted for the team," she said. "It is truly lovely to see them getting the recognition they deserve. This work is a great example of collaborative working with Alzheimer's Scotland and hope this can be replicated in other settings."

The Royal College of Nursing Scotland Nurse of the Year Awards are designed to shine a light on excellence in Scottish nursing, acknowledging, highlighting, and celebrating the unwavering commitment and exceptional professional care provided by our nursing staff. They also recognise the innovation, leadership, and dedication to learning displayed within the nursing community.

Education for Triple Jeopardy's project was underpinned by Care Empathia which is 'the head, the heart, and the hand' approach to care of people with dementia. The head refers to equipping staff with the knowledge of the impact and individual experience of dementia.

The heart refers to developing the values and compassion of staff teams working with people with dementia. While the hand refers to how staff develop skills in working in partnership with people with dementia, supporting fundamental care needs (eating, drinking, washing, dressing and communication) and care, which is welcome.

Colin Poolman, RCN Scotland Executive Director said: "Practice-based learning is fundamental to maintaining the nursing workforce. In an often-overlooked area of nursing, the Triple Jeopardy team has created a high-quality learning environment focused on the needs of forensic nurses and their patients where all involved feel seen and empowered to deliver high quality patient care. Delighted to see a light shining on those nursing at the edges of society, well deserved."

The team was announced winner of the Learning in Practice Award at a ceremony in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, on Thursday, 12 June 2025.

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Notes for Editors:

For further information on the State Hospital please visit www.tsh.scot.nhs.uk.

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