

Black History Month

1st - 31st October

Black History Month (BHM) is held each year in October, with a programme that promotes the history and contribution that African and Caribbean communities have made to the UK, helping to understand the present through our past. This national celebration aims to promote and celebrate Black contributions to British society, and to foster an understanding of Black history in general.

In 2017, BHM will celebrate the 30th anniversary of Black History Month in the UK and to mark this occasion the Trust is displaying an exhibition of stories taken from our own Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff who have worked in the NHS over these past 30 years. These stories tell the changes which some of our own BAME staff have seen during 30 years in the NHS and the challenges and achievements they have faced along the way.

For further information regarding the exhibition or to find out more about the Trust's initiatives to improve BAME inclusion, such as our commitment to the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and the Trust's BAME staff network, which offers advice and support to our BAME staff and allies and invites all staff to join, please contact sally.lawson@heartofengland.nhs.uk



Valerie Swaby

Black History Month 1st - 31st October

Valerie Swaby was born in Birmingham to Jamaican parents and joined the NHS in 1986. She trained in the General Bucknall and North Staffordshire Royal Hospitals and currently works as a staff nurse in the Treatment Centre in the Out Patients Department.

Talking of when she joined the NHS, Val said: "During my training we had to stand to attention if we saw the Nursing Officer or Matron, female nurses wore starched caps and had to have two pairs of shoes to alternate between each day.

"We learnt that if we used the laundry service the hospital provided, we often wouldn't see our uniforms again, so we washed our own uniforms including capes which we wore instead of coats in all weathers."

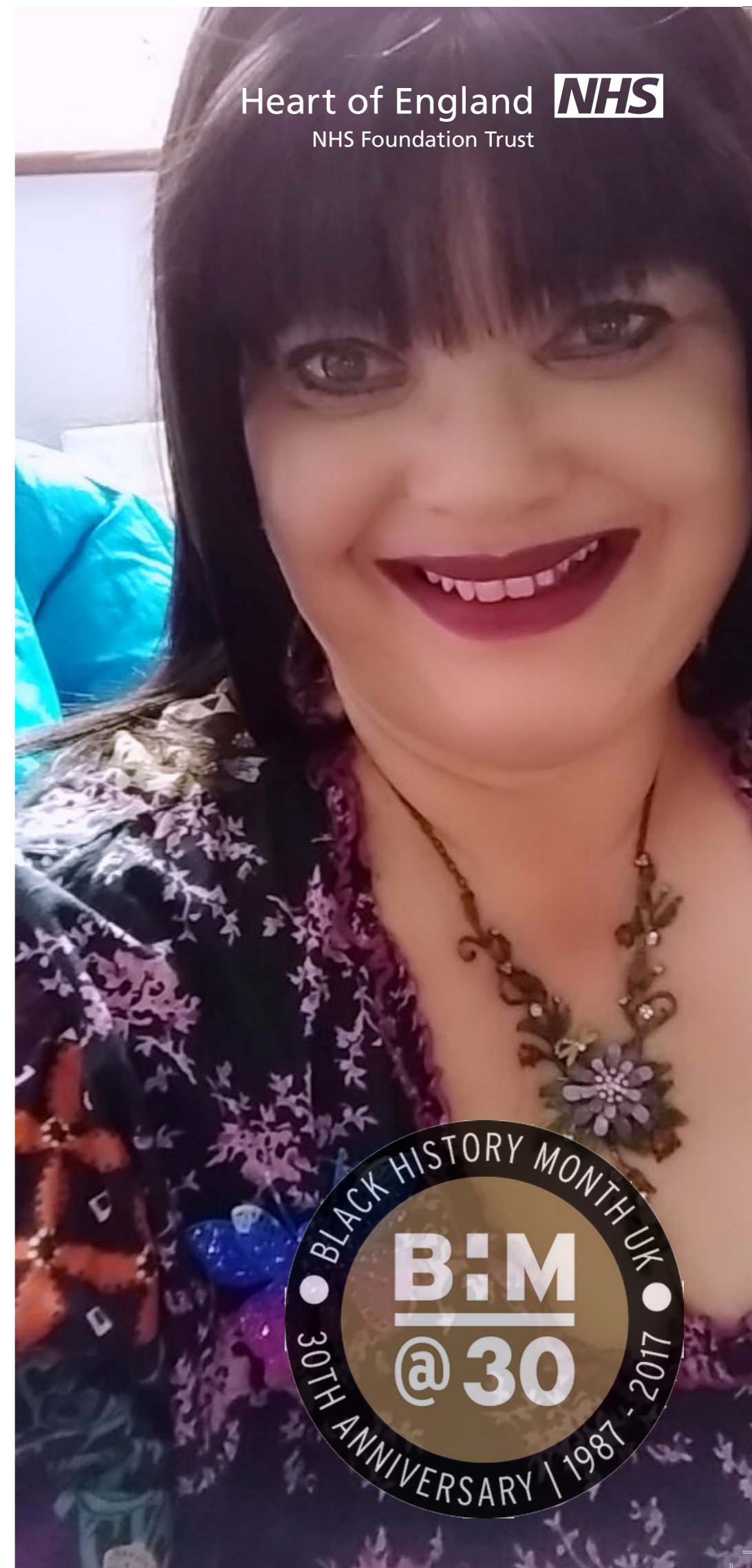
Val worked on a nightingale ward, which had roughly 33-36 patients. The nurses were not allowed to write anything down about the patients, which meant Val had to memorise their diagnosis and medical history.

"I didn't stay in North Staffordshire for too long. When I moved into a house the landlord had to ask the neighbours if it was okay for a 'coloured' person to live on the street."

Val says the most significant change she has seen is the increasing usage of technology in the NHS.

Her advice to others is to be honest when carrying out duties and that there is 'always something new to learn if you're hungry for knowledge.'

She says: "The NHS benefits from all cultures, making it a more interesting and diverse environment to work for."



Lorna Boone

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Lorna Boone is a Clinical Nurse Specialist, working in Palliative Care, who first started working for the NHS in May 1988. Having wanted to work as a nurse since a young age, Lorna sent out a letter to each Birmingham hospital enquiring about vacancies and secured a job at Good Hope Hospital as a plaster room assistant.

Lorna said: "I worked with a plethora of great role models and was inspired to train as a qualified nurse by observing the diverse range of professionals from a multi-cultural background.

"Working, gaining my entry qualifications and balancing family life was a struggle but resulted in enormous personal accomplishment and sense of pride when I was addressed as a senior nurse by the ward sister."

Lorna says her work life as a black female nurse in the NHS has been a positive experience and if she had the chance to start over she would happily do it all again and is currently encouraging and supporting her daughter with her plans to adopt a career in the NHS.

"I would like to end my story by expressing my gratitude at being able to share my experience and hopefully influence the next generation of Black and ethnic NHS healthcare professionals.



Bev Baker

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Bev was born to Jamaican parents who migrated to Birmingham, England in the late 50's. She began her career with the NHS in 1983 as an Auxiliary Nurse, before becoming a Registered Nurse in 1991. Bev joined Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust in 1996 where she first became a sister eventually moved on to become a Ward Manager, then Matron for Gastroenterology in 2014.

Bev said: "Achieving 34 years with a clean slate wasn't easy however being presented as winner in the staff recognition awards, for going above and beyond, was a great highlight in my career, as well as qualifying as a Registered Nurse and to see the pride on my parents' face was absolutely invaluable."

Speaking of her most significant memory of the past 30 years working for the NHS, Bev said: "As a young girl, I had not known death or lost anyone significant in my life to death. In my first job as an Auxiliary Nurse, I was about 20 years old. An elderly patient and I became very close, to the point his family presented me with my first fob watch, which they engraved personally to me, sadly he died and his death really impacted on me."

The biggest challenge she has faced is losing her first child who was stillborn. Bev says the advice she would give to others is to never lose sight of how you make other people feel.

"I've learnt that people will forget what you said... people will forget what you did... but people will never forget how you made them feel..."
'Maya Angelou'

