

# A tribute to Miss Beryl Chadney

## President of the Neonatal Nurses Association

Born 29th March 1918

Died 17th January 2011

Remembered with affection and respect

**M**iss Beryl Chadney began her training in the care of sick children at the 'Infant Hospital' (later named the Westminster Children's) in 1936 and after qualification proceeded onto her general training at The London Hospital, Whitechapel. Completing this in 1941 she worked as a theatre staff nurse before enlisting in the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service as a Flight Officer for four years. Her Air Force career covered the end of WWII and during those four years she worked as a ward and theatre sister in various military hospitals. Her service also included two periods of some months on the SS Mauritania which was originally converted into a troop ship and later became a hospital ship. Although the war in Europe was over, there was still much fighting in the Far East and the Pacific. Sister Chadney, working with an 'American Ships Platoon' of medical staff and orderlies, was responsible for the male ward... where she never did get used to being called Ma'am!

Demobilisation came in 1947 with a gratuity of £30.00! She then worked in several hospitals as a theatre sister/superintendent before returning to her first love, the care of sick children. She was appointed to the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Sick Children, Brighton, as Assistant Matron, and then later as Matron in 1963.

I first met Miss Chadney shortly after her appointment as the Chief Nursing Officer to The Hospital for Sick Children early in 1970, just about the time that I was leaving as a tutor in the School of Nursing. Miss Chadney (later to become Beryl) was friendly, but clearly had a vision of the changes she was seeking to achieve on behalf of nursing and the nursing staff. I also recall that she was neatly dressed in her own clothes! In those days, this was the first time I had seen a very senior nurse on duty out of uniform. During her five years as Chief Nursing Officer (CNO), entirely a



Beryl Chadney giving a tour to Princess Alexandra in 1968.

management post, she introduced many innovative 'firsts' – no easy task within a traditional service! Two significant examples included:

- establishment of a crèche for the children of staff, which helped to improve staff recruitment and retention
- setting up of an intensive care unit for those infants and children who were very ill and required 24/7 one-to-one care.

After five years as the CNO of the Sick Children's Group Beryl joined the Department of Health as Nursing Officer working with the Children's Division. Coincidentally, by that time I was working there, although in a different division. At first, on becoming a 'civil servant' Beryl chafed a bit at the red tape, but quickly she established herself as an active and useful colleague.

In the 70s, infant mortality in England was high. Beryl identified that nurses and midwives working within neonatal and special baby care units often felt isolated, with little communication with colleagues in other units to meet and share knowledge of good practice and to support one another. Before leaving the Department of Health in March 1978 Beryl invited six senior neonatal nurses to meet with her and they formed the nucleus of the Neonatal Nurses Association (NNA), a professional organisation which very

quickly reached into units throughout the UK. Regular regional meetings were held, with a yearly national conference. Beryl was elected the first President of the NNA, which continued to be active in improving the care and services given to sick and small infants and their families.

On retirement Beryl pursued many of her interests. Cricket was her passion and she was a member of the Essex County Cricket Club. Her enthusiasm for the game took her to the Caribbean, New Zealand and Australia for the Test series. She was a regular Bridge player. Beryl researched her family history and was a flower arranger at her local church. Very importantly she maintained links with many colleagues (from all disciplines) throughout her career.

Beryl Chadney was a great innovator in a rather traditional profession which was not always an easy road to travel but she did so with a masterly blend of assertiveness, dignity and a 'general niceness' or charm. A woman with many successful firsts! But the picture would not be complete without reference to her wonderful and sometimes quirky sense of humour. In her last letter to me written a few weeks before her death, she wrote: "I am managing quite well to get around my flat with a Zimmer frame and a walking stick .... not at the same time of course!"

By **Barbara F Weller**

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