

Retirement of Ann Knowles after 52 years of dedicated work in nursing: a tribute

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Most of the readers of *The Diabetic Foot Journal* will know, or at least know of, Ann Knowles who was a pioneer in the development of the role of the “diabetic specialist foot nurse” from the late 1980s onwards. Ann retired on 31 May 2020 after 52 years working as a nurse.

Ann was born in Harrogate but her family soon moved on and eventually settled in Manchester, some 10 years later. She enrolled as a student nurse at North Manchester General (then known as Crumpsall) Hospital, and as a student had a 42 hour week, with one day off a week and a half day on Sunday, so that she was able to go to church. After qualification, Ann took an orthopaedic nursing certificate at Crumpsall, and later worked for a while at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital in Birmingham. Returning to Manchester in 1973, she first worked in the Fracture Clinic at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, and in the next decade continued to work at the hospital intermittently. I (AJMB) first met Ann in 1987 soon after my arrival as a Consultant/Senior Lecturer, when she applied for a research post that I had for studies in diabetic neuropathy. At the interview (I am not quite sure who was interviewing whom?!), it was clear that she was able and dedicated to nursing, with a particular interest in diabetic neuropathy. It soon became apparent that her past history of orthopaedic and fracture clinic working was going to be most helpful in the development of our diabetes foot service. Ann worked closely with Nicky Jackson, another diabetes specialist nurse with an interest in the diabetic foot, in the establishment of the diabetic foot service, which was based on the model that had recently been described by our friends and colleagues at King’s College Hospital, London, led by Mike Edmonds and Ali Foster (Edmonds et al, 1986).

Ann was instrumental in developing the casting service for the management of neuropathic foot ulcers in Manchester, and early on had visited other centres using the Scotchcast boot technique, including Leicester and Blackburn. Ann was also responsible for developing larval (maggot) therapy in Manchester many years ago, and this was picked up by local TV.

Not only is Ann an outstanding nurse, but a skilled researcher and teacher. She taught the techniques of diabetic foot care and management not only in Manchester and other parts of the UK, but also worldwide: she has helped other nurses and healthcare professionals with their training in diabetic foot care across the world, including countries as diverse as Brazil, Bermuda, Scandinavia and India. It was in 1990 that Ann, together with myself (AJMB) and other members of the diabetic foot team, were very privileged to be asked to take part, and speak, at one of the Carville courses on the management of the insensitised foot in diabetes and leprosy. The Gillis W Long Hansen’s Disease Research Centre was, at that time, situated in a rural part of Louisiana, USA, near the banks of the Mississippi, the nearest large town being the capital, Baton Rouge. The teaching of Paul Brand was inspirational and not only did this help Ann, but of course the whole of the diabetic foot team.

Ann was a dedicated and much loved nurse by the patients who had immense respect for her and were generally very careful to follow her advice: some referred to Ann as “the Duchess” or “the headmistress”! Indeed, Ann had a knack for clinical observation and many a patient was caught out by her for not wearing their Scotchcast boots in settings, such as a public bus, an open market in the district of Gorton in Manchester and even the hospital corridor!

Needless to say these patients subsequently wore the offloading device with positive end-results. Ann was also held with great respect by all other members of the diabetic foot team and other physicians and healthcare professionals at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and elsewhere. There is no doubt that Ann has contributed in a major way to saving many limbs over the thirty years of dedicated service to diabetic foot care, not only in the North West UK, but globally.

Although we will miss Ann in the diabetic foot clinic, we are delighted that she has agreed to continue occasional teaching of nurses and healthcare professionals in the prevention and management of those with diabetic foot problems. *Figures 1–3* show Ann, together with colleagues, at her 70th birthday party put on by the diabetic foot care team at the end of one of the Friday morning multi-disciplinary diabetic foot clinics. All who are used to making Scotchcast boots will be amused by the birthday cake that was specially baked for her: we should point out that this event occurred well before the current COVID-19 pandemic, hence the lack of social distancing! We wish her well in her retirement. ■

Edmonds ME, Blundell MP, Morris ME et al (1986) Improved survival of the diabetic foot: the role of a specialized foot clinic. *Q J Med* 60(232): 763–71



Figure 1. Ann (second from right) together with Dr Clare Adamson, Andrew Boulton and Tawqeer Rashid caught taking a 'selfie'.



Figure 2. Ann together with some of the diabetic foot podiatrists at Manchester Royal Infirmary.



Figure 3. A rather unusual birthday cake based on a Scotchcast boot.