

# Nurses need to counteract negative stereotypes of the profession in top YouTube hits

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The nursing profession needs to harness the power of the video-sharing website YouTube to promote a positive image of nurses, after research found that many of the top hits portray them in a derogatory way. That is the key finding of research published in the August issue of the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

Researchers examined the YouTube database to find the most viewed videos for "nurses" and "nursing". Ninety-six videos were included after preliminary analysis of the first 50 hits for each word. The top ten hits - attracting between 61,695 and 901,439 hits - were then analysed in greater detail.

"Our study found that nurses were depicted in three main ways – as a skilled knower and doer, a sexual plaything and a witless incompetent" says co-author Dr Gerard Fealy, from the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems at University College Dublin, Ireland.

Key findings of the study included:

- The ten most viewed videos reflected a variety of media, including promotional videos, advertising, excerpts from a TV situation comedy and a cartoon. Some texts dramatised, caricatured and parodied nurse-patient and inter-professional

encounters.

- Four of the ten clips were posted by nurses and presented images of them as educated, smart and technically skilled. They included nurses being interviewed, dancing and performing a rap song, all of which portrayed nursing as a valuable and rewarding career. The nurses were shown as a distinct professional group working in busy clinical hospitals, where their knowledge and skills counted.
- Nurses were portrayed as a sexual plaything in media-generated video clips from the American sitcom *Frasier*, a Virgin Mobile commercial set in a hospital, a lingerie advertisement and a soft news item on an internet TV show. All showed the nurses as provocatively dressed objects of male sexual fantasies and willing accomplices in their advances.
- The final two clips were a cartoon that portrayed a nurse in an Alzheimer's unit as dim and incompetent and an American sitcom that showed the nurse as a dumb blonde, expressing bigoted and ignorant views about patients and behaving in a callous and unprofessional way.

"The nurse and nursing stereotypes on YouTube are very similar to those reported in studies on television shows, which seem to appeal to a particular public need for medical melodramas and provide TV stations with valuable advertising revenue" says Dr Fealy.

"The same revenue-generating possibilities exist on the internet and it is hardly surprising that its commercial potential should bring with it the continued portrayal of nursing stereotypes.

"Despite being hailed as a medium of the people, our study showed that YouTube is no different to other mass media in the way that it propagates gender-bound, negative and demeaning nursing stereotypes. Such stereotypes can influence how people see nurses and behave

towards them.

"We feel that the professional bodies that regulate and represent nurses need to lobby legislators to protect the profession from undue negative stereotyping and support nurses who are keen to use YouTube to promote their profession in a positive light."

**More information:** The image of you: constructing nursing identities in YouTube. Kelly et al. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 68.8, pp1804-1813. (August 2012). doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2011.05872.x

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