

Stories of child patients in early NHS unearthed

April 23 2018, by Mike Addelman

A University of Manchester historian is to highlight the untold experiences of children who were admitted to hospital in the early years of the NHS.

In a special lecture on April 24 supported by the NHS Confederation—marking the NHS's 70th anniversary of the launch of the National Health Service—Dr. Stephanie Snow will explore the human stories which define the NHS of the past and future.

Dr. Snow is creating the first shared social history of the NHS, by collecting recordings, photos and other memorabilia, charting the momentous changes in the UK's healthcare system since 1948, through 'NHS at 70: The Story of Our Lives' initiative.

She will tell how the NHS created new opportunities for fulltime paediatricians, culminating the 1962 Hospital Plan to include paediatrics as an essential service in all hospitals.

But she will also recount how parents were not allowed full visiting rights to their [children](#), causing terrible distress to families.

It was only when Sir Harry Platt, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, at The University of Manchester and President of the Royal College of Surgeons reviewed arrangements for children in hospital in 1956 when things began to change.

Sir Harry recommended unlimited parental visiting though even by 1962, Platt said that 'tradition and the difficulty of adapting existing hospital structures have curbed the pace of reform'.

Patricia Silverman was a 5-year-old child in hospital in 1948. She told Dr. Snow: "I got upset in the hospital so they banned my mum and dad from seeing me. Can you believe that?"

"I remember one day I saw them peeping round from behind a screen at the entrance to the ward I just went mad.

"They disappeared because they were scared and didn't want to upset the staff

"I can remember running all over the hospital but someone must have caught me and taken me back."

And Elizabeth Scanlon worked as a children's nurse at Booth Hall Children's Hospital in the 1950s. She later became involved with the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital (NAWTCH) now known as Action for Sick Children.

She said: "The children became our responsibility when they came into [hospital](#). I can remember the children being really upset when their parents were leaving.

"We had to go and comfort the children and say: 'It's alright, we're going to look after you.'

"It was military almost, I suppose. That's why I joined NAWTCH whose main aim was to get parents access to children at all times."

Dr. Snow said: "NHS at 70: The Story of Our Lives is about capturing

the seventieth anniversary of the NHS as a catalyst for a conscious focus on its past.

"And the NHS has an advantage over other significant historical anniversaries, because we still have access to people who participated in its 1948 creation

"But the timer is fast running out on the opportunity we have to collect this history, especially from the earliest years."

She added: "Part of that narrative is the need to build children's experiences into the wider history of the NHS

"People like Patricia and Elizabeth's testimonies will give us not just a richer understanding of children's experiences but also help modern medicine more responsive to children's needs."

Provided by University of Manchester

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