



the 1st black nurse in the NHS

Annie Peppiatt tells the forgotten
story of Chief Kofoworola Abeni

Image: nursingtimes.net

Chief Kofoworola Abeni Pratt was a pioneer and a leader. Kofoworola was born in 1915 in Lagos, Nigeria, under British colonialism. From childhood, she wanted to become a nurse, but was discouraged by her father, so she became a teacher. She then married Dr Olu Pratt, a Nigerian pharmacist who later studied medicine in London. Kofoworola immigrated to England in 1946 and pursued her dream of nursing.

She was the first black student to study at the Nightingale School at St Thomas' Hospital, London. Despite experiencing racism, Kofoworola qualified as a state-registered nurse in 1950 and became the first black nurse to work for the NHS.

After a few years of dedicated service to the NHS, Kofoworola returned to Nigeria. After rejection based on her heritage, she persisted to become the first black Matron of University College Hospital, Ibadan. In 1965, she established a nursing school that was instrumental to modern nursing practices in Nigeria. She founded the Professional Association of Trained Nurses in Nigeria and co-founded and edited a nursing journal.

A hardworking and determined woman, Kofoworola went on to become Chief Nursing Officer for Nigeria. She was the first black woman to be vice-president of the International Council of Nurses. She was appointed Commissioner of Health for Lagos and President of Nigeria's National Council of Women's Societies. She achieved reforms for doctors, nurses, and public health care.

Her outstanding work has been recognised with a chieftaincy title for services to Nigeria and as an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Nursing, UK. In 1973, she was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal. Overcoming challenges and prejudice in both the UK and Nigeria, she championed women and was a great nurse and leader. 🌟

Annie Peppiatt, a freelance editor who has a special interest in promoting underrepresented voices