

prison  
nursing

# inside the walls

**Bethany Fuller** shares  
her experience of prison  
nursing as a student



The slow whirring of the automatic airlock door mixed with the officer's jangling key chains as we stood staring at the security camera in the small three-by-six-foot chamber. Thirty seconds later, we stepped into the key collection room. The nurse punched in her code and received the clanging set of keys. A massive iron door opened for us and we stepped through. We were inside the men's prison. As I followed the nurse through a series of 13 gates and yards, I wondered how far we had to go to the healthcare wing. But, before we could get to our destination, we were diverted by two prison officers to have our bags checked for contraband and stood with our arms by our sides for the sniffer dog. I suddenly had a dreadful feeling that I was an unwitting drug smuggler and would never get out of those walls again. But thankfully, the cheese in my sandwiches hadn't morphed into cocaine, so I was free to carry on my journey to the healthcare wing.

### Reflections of a student nurse

From the security measures to the patient-nurse relationship, and the at first incomprehensible jargon, everything had a slight twist to anything I'd ever experienced in nursing before. Everything was so noisy, there

was no peace. The essential nurse-patient relationship remained, but I had never felt the poignancy of the power balance quite so acutely before. All the men called the nurses 'miss' and were very respectful towards us. They would often tell the nurses things they were scared to tell the officers for fear of repercussions from other prisoners. I remember one young man who came to the clinic one morning and told us he had been blocked in a cell and beaten by two other prisoners because he had not paid a debt on time.

### How does it work?

The health wing in the prison ran very much like a GP surgery. A part-time GP, a dentist, psychologists, and the mental health nurses formed part of the staff. Then there was the adult trained nurses who ran various clinics, such as diabetes, epilepsy, respiratory, bloods, and triaging and treating wounds and other ailments, as well as any emergency responses to the wings and medication administration.

Great emphasis was placed on the management of long-term conditions and working with the patients to help them understand their conditions more.

According to Shannon Trust over fifty per cent of UK prisoners are functionally illiterate, meaning they have a reading ability of age 11 or below, and many cannot read at all. When you think how much health information is relayed in leaflets and information posters, you begin to understand how important the healthcare professional's role is in health promotion for this demographic.

## The need for Christian witness

Perhaps what I was not prepared for was the staff themselves. In this particular prison, they were openly hostile to God. They purposefully blasphemed Jesus' holy Name and mercilessly mocked believers. They even laughed that if anyone tried to convert them, they were beyond saving. Such spiritual poverty in the knowledge of God was exposed to me in that prison and I felt powerless to know how to witness to Christ. But his power is made perfect in weakness, and he graciously allowed me to witness to the Muslim dentist and one



of the nurses during my time there. Many faithful Christians have made it their life's work to tell those in the justice system about Jesus, and I thank God for them.

## What can I do?

Many members of CMF, both doctors and nurses, and other associates, work within prisons both in the UK and abroad. When we pray, let's remember these workers and pray their hearts would remain soft in the hand of the Lord in a hardening and cynical environment. Pray they would be effective in their work and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ for his glory and the salvation of many. 🌹

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