

Nurses and Midwives - the Heart of Healthcare in Namibia

Nurses and midwives are the backbone of the health care system. They play a crucial role in health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment. In fact, we can't achieve universal health coverage or reach Sustainable Development Goal 3 without nurses.

These are just some of the reasons why the World Health Organization has declared 2020 the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, in honor of the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingales. As we gear up to celebrate the birthday of perhaps the world's most famous nurse next year, we're already celebrating and appreciating the nurses and midwives of Namibia. They are the frontline health care champions who show up every day, acting as agents of change at their health facilities.

IntraHealth International, with financial support from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), implements the USAID HIV Clinical Services Technical Assistance Program (UTAP), which works with the government of Namibia to strengthen integrated HIV care and treatment services and close the gaps in the care continuum. IntraHealth also provides training, mentoring, and technical support to enable health workers to deliver high-quality, comprehensive health services.

In preparation for 2020, the "Year of the Nurse and the Midwife", IntraHealth's Valery Mwashesheke, Senior Communications Officer, and Cherizaan Willems, Programs Officer, interviewed nurses and midwives from each of the eight UTAP-supported districts: Onandjokwe, Oshikuku, Engela (Odibo), Andara, Nyangana, Omuthiya, Tsumeb, and Grootfontein. Here are their stories:



Marvelous Mariwa, Registered Nurse and Midwife, Andara District Hospital, Kavango East

Marvelous Mariwa was inspired by her mother to become a nurse. Helping patients motivates her to do her job. She says:

I became a nurse because of my mother, who was also a nurse. But as time went on, I got motivated by the zeal to assist sick people. What I like most about being a nurse is that I'm able to save lives! Although we are faced with challenges daily—like understaffing and being verbally abused or harassed by patients—it's the little things, like the appreciation from patients and their families, that motivates you to keep on making a difference in people's lives.

I would like to encourage young people to become nurses, since we need more nurses, but also to remind them that nursing is not about money—nursing is a passion and should come from your heart.



Emma Ndango, Registered Nurse, Nyangana District Hospital, Kavango East

Emma Ndango says nursing is not about medicine but about compassion and rendering love to the patients, adding that love does not need a prescription. What she loves about her job is helping pregnant women deliver safe and healthy babies. She says:

I enjoy being a midwife. I remember the first time I witnessed a delivery—seeing the mother holding her new baby after having been in labour for 19 hours, seeing tears of joy coursing down her face and her saying, "I have waited for you for so long"—there is just nothing that could ever compare to that.

Helping to bring a new life into the world as a midwife is the best job on Earth. Sharing that joy and miracle of life with mothers every day makes this profession so unique and beautiful.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind my beloved nurses all over the world: your passion for your patients' health is appreciated every day. Thank you for all you do, much love!



No-more Jongwe, Registered Nurse, Nyangana District Hospital, Kavango East

No-more Jongwe works at the Nyangana Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) clinic as an ART nurse.

Participating in UTAP's trainings, workshops, and mentorship has increased his knowledge and skills in managing ART. He says:

I love my job as an ART nurse because I like helping people and saving lives. I chose to work in HIV because the illness is still highly discriminated against and stigmatized. As difficult as it can get being an ART nurse, I like dealing with patients who don't adhere to their medication—it is very rewarding at times. I remember in 2017, when we as a district celebrated our first milestone in preventing HIV transmission from mothers to their children with the former U.S. Ambassador to Namibia, Thomas F. Daughton. It was a joyous day and reminded me why I chose to become a nurse.

I have learned a lot about clinical HIV management and the social aspects of clients. I believe every nurse was drawn to nursing because of a desire to care, to serve, or to help. Let's continue serving and healing our communities.



Alina Nepela, Senior Registered Nurse, Onandjokwe District, Oshikoto Region

Alina Nepela, the primary health care supervisor of Onandjokwe district, felt called to nursing and loves to help and educate her community about health issues. Nepela is one of the nurses who participated in trainings provided by IntraHealth's UTAP project. She says the integrated approach to patient management helps her team save more lives and she thanks her government for partnering with international organizations that provide aid to make the work of nurses easier. She says:

I love nursing because it keeps on evolving. One of the challenges we faced as a team and managed to solve is to ensure that the nurses recruited through UTAP and those employed by the government realize that we are one team and should work as one. During the implementation of the integrated patient care management approach, it was difficult for the UTAP team to understand that, since they are employed for HIV services. Integration is a one-stop shop where you are expected to deal with other health issues as well. But after explaining to them the benefits of integration and the need for it, the team understood and today we are working as one and implementing integration.

I would like to thank PEPFAR and USAID through IntraHealth for its financial and technical assistance. Through UTAP, we received vehicles and a driver. We are now able to take quality integrated health services to our patients through outreach in hard to reach areas.



Andreas Ntinda, Enrolled Nurse, Onandjokwe District Hospital, Oshikoto Region

Andreas Ntinda was inspired by the health workers who used to visit his village to treat people. He says:

For as long as I can remember, I have always liked helping people, and nursing is one of those professions that is all about helping the next

person. Besides being inspired, I can truly say my love, passion, and heart for the next person was the primary reason I decided to become a nurse. I would like to advise young people, especially young men, to consider nursing as a profession, especially if you have a heart for people, because we have such a shortage of male nurses and in general a shortage of nurses in our country. For the sake of our health care system and our nation, I would really like to encourage young people to consider a career in nursing. Our nation needs us! I would like to thank and encourage my fellow nursing colleagues to work hard, to stay committed, and to always give their all, because it is important to always provide quality care and to treat our patients with the necessary respect.



Frans Tweuiflwa, Enrolled Nurse, Omuthiya District Hospital, Oshikoto Region

Frans Tweuiflwa, an ART nurse, likes preventing people from getting sick and inspiring others. He says:

I like being a nurse because of the different fields of nursing. I mostly enjoy primary health care because you work with the prevention of diseases. I don't like to see people sick. I like to prevent people from becoming sick by educating them with health information and immunizing them.

At the ART clinic where I'm currently based, we educate people about HIV and AIDS and provide them with care and treatment.

To me, nursing is about saving lives. It is like being in the army where you save lives—that's why I regard nurses as soldiers. To my fellow nurses all over the world, let's continue rendering quality health care services to our patients!



Thalita Hipondoka, Registered Nurse, Omuthiya District Hospital, Oshikoto Region

Thalita Hipondoka is a midwife and theater nurse in charge of infection, prevention & control and a quality-improvement coordinator at Omuthiya's maternity ward. She loves to interact with her patients and is still at their bedside after 24 years. She says:

I love being a nurse for many reasons—mostly because it has brought me into the lives of people whom I wouldn't have met if I weren't a nurse. Some of the most interesting people I have ever met came into my life because I'm a nurse.

I like nursing because it's a profession that never stops giving, a profession of diversity. You can still be a nurse and at the same time be a researcher or nursing educator. What I never wanted to lose is the connection with my people, my patients; and that's why, after 24 years, I'm still in the operational field with my beautiful uniform. When I enter the hospital, I feel patients value me, I feel I belong here, I feel I belong at the bedside of patients. I feel so good inside when I see

improvement in my patients and when giving emotional support by holding the hands of family members who have just experienced tragedy. Actually, it gives me an inner peace that I was able to help somebody. Yes, we have challenges—like shortages of equipment, resources, and nurses which result in long working hours—but we work with enthusiasm to make the most of what we have because the Health Minister urged us to do more with the little we have, and we do that with a smile. My fellow nurses let's honour the logo of the Ministry of Health, which says, "Your health, our priority"—let's make our patients' health a top priority!



Israel Hailoula, Registered Nurse, Oshikuku District Hospital, Omusati Region

Israel Hailoula is the infection, prevention & control focal point at Oshikuku district hospital. He says:

As a young boy visiting hospitals, I saw how beautiful the nurses looked in their white uniforms and the way they cared and provided services to their patients. That touched my heart and inspired me to become one of them.

What I love about my job as a nurse is when I see a patient who was in poor health come back to us strengthened and recuperated. You feel so satisfied in your work, in what you've managed to achieve. Giving patients their confidence back, putting a smile on their faces and seeing them happy again is so rewarding.

I believe that improving the quality of health care will save more lives. I also want to encourage men to consider becoming nurses as we need more male nurses for our male patients. Forget about the stigma that nursing has traditionally been considered a feminine role. The job opportunities as a nurse are endless, and you end up going home every day knowing that you did something very positive for someone else.

For me, nurses are agents of change. Let's take responsibility and be accountable. Let's not provide services based on gender, race, political affiliation, or economic status—let's have empathy and sympathy for all.



Emminah Mapurisa, Registered Nurse, Grootfontein Poly Clinic, Otjozondjupa Region

Emminah Mapurisa loves being an ART nurse because she can have an impact on teenagers and change their lives. And she loves that nurses can specialize in different fields. She says:

Teenage pregnancy rates in Namibia are high. But if you educate teenagers about family planning and the dangers of teenage

pregnancies, hopefully they can avoid falling pregnant and change their behaviors.

I believe through nursing you can impact somebody's life and have good results.

I would like to thank PEPFAR and USAID for the HIV trainings provided by IntraHealth through UTAP's support. Because of UTAP, I can proudly say that I'm an ART nurse. I now have this passion for HIV and want to remain in this field.

Today, when one of my patients defaults from treatment, I do everything, I can't trace them and investigate why they don't take their medicine and find a way to get them back on treatment. I believe I can improve more lives by training more nurses about the disease and educating patients about HIV, so that they can see that HIV is not a death sentence, but merely a chronic disease.



Anastasia Ndazapo, Registered Nurse at Tsumeb District Hospital, Oshikoto Region

Anastasia Ndazapo, an ART nurse, loves working with people and encourages patients to take responsibility for their health. She says:

I became a nurse because I like working with people who are sick, I like to help people, and I like to make an impact on their lives.

The best part of being a nurse is the satisfaction I get when I see a life that could have been lost and has been saved. Most of our patients living with HIV have a problem accepting their status, resulting in adherence problems, despite receiving intensive adherence counselling. I remember this one client I helped—he was misusing alcohol and stopped taking his medication. Consequently, his viral load went up. I took it upon myself to sit him down and explain to him the dangers of misusing alcohol while on treatment. It took some convincing to get him into an adherence counselling session every month. Now as we speak, the patient is doing well, and his viral load is suppressed. This is so rewarding.

Let's be competent and educate our patients to understand what is expected from them; to feel free to come to the health facility to seek health services.

I had a patient that was failing ART treatment, which resulted to them failing first- and second-line treatment. I had to step in to intensify adherence and to really ensure that the patient understood the seriousness of the matter. Today, I can proudly say that the patient has a suppressed viral load and is doing very well and, until today, comes to thank us for the positive impact we've had on their life. That to me is the most gratifying feeling, knowing that I could contribute toward the wellbeing of another person.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank PEPFAR and USAID for the HIV trainings provided by IntraHealth International through UTAP's support. Because of UTAP, I can proudly say that I'm a trained, skilled, and well-equipped ART nurse, able to deliver standard quality health services for all.



Sylvia Haoses, Registered Nurse, Tsumeb District Hospital, Oshikoto Region

Sylvia Haoses, the district TB Coordinator at Tsumeb district hospital says that while physical care is the main component of a nurse's job, providing emotional support is just as important. She says:

I've always been passionate about helping and serving not just my community but anyone I would meet that needed any form of help. The fact that I could contribute to someone

else's wellbeing, especially their health, has been one of the biggest motivators to pursue this career with everything inside of me.

I've helped and taken care of very many patients, and the most rewarding part has always been being there for patients emotionally, because I firmly believe that one's emotions can determine physical health and recovery time.

Being a nurse has been incredibly rewarding. However, it also comes with numerous challenges, and one of those challenges has been a lack of resources. As a nurse, you're expected to provide quality health care, however that cannot be optimally achieved if the resources aren't available. We often must improvise, because at the end of the day, someone's life is in your hands, and you must do everything possible to put their health first.

We have successfully integrated TB care into health services at Kuvukiland (a community clinic based in an informal settlement) and this has been because of the human resources, training, and technical support we've received as a district from UTAP through IntraHealth International. The support provided by UTAP has brought about a fast change, and to them it may be a drop in the ocean, but to us it has brought about immense change, and for that we will always be thankful.



Liisa Ndlilmondwi, Registered Nurse, Oshikuku District Hospital, Omusati Region

For Sister Liisa Ndlilmondwi, an ART nurse, choosing a career wasn't going to be a run-of-the-mill decision—she wanted to have impact and bring about positive change in the lives of others. She says:

I looked at various professions, but the one that stood out from the rest was indeed nursing. Nursing is that one profession that brings about change and impact in the lives of others, which for me is the most rewarding thing ever.

We had a patient that was failing ART treatment, which resulted to them failing first- and second-line treatment. I had to step in to intensify adherence and to really ensure that the patient understood the seriousness of the matter. Today, I can proudly say that the patient has a suppressed viral load and is doing very well and, until today, comes to thank us for the positive impact we've had on their life. That to me is the most gratifying feeling, knowing that I could contribute toward the wellbeing of another person.

I would like people living with HIV to understand that there is life and love after being diagnosed with HIV. The most important things are to love yourself, take your medicine, and live a healthy lifestyle.

It is not how much we do—it is how much love we put into the doing that matters. Continue to spread love and care!

Nursing is surely not for everyone. It takes a very strong, intelligent, and compassionate person to care for the sick with such passion and dedication. We often take nurses for granted as "just" the people assisting doctors in their work. But nursing is an incredibly difficult and exhausting job, one filled with quiet heroes, with the toughest and most dedicated people to the profession. Let's appreciate them more and show them the necessary respect! A special thanks to all the nurses for their valuable contributions.

By: Valery Mwashesheke, Senior Communications Officer, and Cherizaan Willems, Programs Officer

Without nurses and midwives, Namibia can't achieve universal health coverage or reach sustainable development goal three.