COMMONWEALTH NURSES FEDERATION

REPORT

Commonwealth Professional Fellowship
2012

SUMMARY

The Commonwealth Nurses Federation (CNF) was delighted to be awarded two Commonwealth Professional Fellowships in Round 2 of 2011 of the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme in the United Kingdom. The Fellowships were an outstanding success. The CNF was fortunate in that the two candidates selected for the Fellowships were outstanding young people, full of enthusiasm and a desire to learn and benefit from the unique opportunity given them. They impressed everyone with whom they had contact with their energy, interest, commitment and charm and were eager at the completion of the Fellowship to return home to put into practice and share what they had learned. The objectives of the CNF were fully met beyond our expectations and we were humbled by the gratitude of two young people who face enormous difficulties in their chosen profession in their home country and were refreshed and encouraged that the nursing profession in Cameroon has such wonderful future leaders.
INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth Nurses Federation (CNF) was founded in 1973 and is a federation of national nursing and midwifery organisations in Commonwealth Countries. The purpose of the CNF is to improve nursing standards and competence; strengthen nursing leadership; enhance nursing education; develop nursing networks; and influence health policy throughout the Commonwealth. As part of its commitment to strengthening nursing leadership, the CNF Board sought to undertake a program of professional development for young potential nurse leaders in developing Commonwealth countries through application to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission for Commonwealth Professional Fellowships. The CNF Board chose West Africa as their initial focus as the CNF region most in need of their support.

The two candidates chosen were two young nurse leaders from Cameroon: Clarisse Bombi Lamnyam and Tita Pale Isa Ndognjem. Both Clarisse and Tita had been observed during CNF activities in Cameroon mid-2010 as having leadership potential and a strong commitment to improving nursing in their country. Further correspondence with the candidates, an examination of their personal and professional activities over time, and information received from their professional body and peers in Cameroon, convinced the CNF that Clarisse and Tita would be exemplary Fellows.

The specific objectives of the Fellowship for the CNF were to provide these young people with an opportunity to further develop their skills in leadership; communication and networking; and organisational governance and management in order to enhance their contribution to nursing and health within their own country.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Clarisse and Tita were based at the CNF office in the International Department of the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London. They were provided with an introduction to staff and a tour of the College including the Library where they chose to work when they were at the College as it was quiet; there was plenty of space; as well as a fast internet connection and by working in the Library they were not disrupting other staff working in the International Department. The RCN also has a subsidised staff canteen where hot and cold meals are available at a reduced price. Clarisse and Tita were warmly welcomed by RCN staff, particularly those in the International Department and Library. They were given their own staff passes to enter the building, and felt extremely comfortable in that environment. The Secretary General of the RCN, Dr Peter Carter, was very supportive of having Clarisse and Tita at the RCN and took an interest in their progress.

Clarisse at the Royal College of Nursing  RCN International Department staff  Tita at RCN
It was very clear that Clarisse and Tita understood the objectives of their Fellowship, writing in their journal: *The overall goal of this fellowship was to empower young nurses from developing countries with respect to professional development; leadership; and management, to enable them to positively impact on the nursing profession and professional association in their home countries.*

As part of their professional growth, Clarisse and Tita were provided with two external mentors during their fellowship, both senior nurses with close links to the RCN and to the CNF. Ms Paula Hancock is the CNF Board Member for the CNF Europe Region and a member of the RCN International Committee and Ms Maura Buchanan is the immediate past President of the RCN. Paula and Maura made weekly contact with Clarisse and Tita and were there to guide them, answer questions, and link them with relevant people to support their experience. *We worked together with our principal mentor Jill Iliffe and were in regular contact with our other two mentors Maura Buchanan and Paula Hancock, who followed our progress to enable us to achieve our objectives. Some important persons were visited each with some specific objective related to professional development, leadership and management. Clarisse and Tita also visited Paula who lives in Sheffield and Maura who lives in Oxford which gave them an opportunity to experience travel by train and also see more of the United Kingdom than London.*

*Wednesday was truly an amazing day with Paula in Sheffield. We had a very enriching, educative and fun time. Paula was very nice and hospitable and worked so hard to make our day unforgettable and for that we are truly grateful.*

*Clarisse and Tita with Paula Hancock*

*Clarisse and Tita with Maura Buchanan*
Paula and Maura developed a strong and caring bond with Clarisse and Tita and were wonderful mentors for them. The CNF is very grateful to Paula and Maura for their willingness to and enthusiasm in sharing their own time and expertise with Clarisse and Tita who were particularly honoured in being invited to share a meal with Paula and Maura in their respective homes.

Clarisse and Tita arranged their own accommodation during their Fellowship. Clarisse had a relative living in Upper Norwood while Tita had a friend who was studying in the UK and residing in London with whom he could stay. Both Clarisse relative and Tita’s friend were contacted to ensure that their accommodation arrangements were appropriate.

Clarisse and Tita very quickly became familiar with London public transport and readily adjusted to the cold weather; in fact they were absolutely delighted when it snowed in London as it was the first time they had seen snow. They were encouraged to spend time during their weekends in visiting the many wonderful tourist attractions London has to offer. One of the highlights for them was riding in a London taxi. In their words: *It was a great experience taking a cab through the streets of London; our first ride in a London cab. Passing close to the Queen’s palace was very enjoyable and concluded a week that was very exciting, adventurous and educative.*

**OBJECTIVES**

(a) Leadership development

Clarisse and Tita were enrolled in three short courses. The first was a three day course on Leadership and Management at the University College London. The other two courses: Leadership and Team Building and Managing Change were conducted at Birkbeck University of London. The courses were a combination of lectures, group work, and assignments. All three courses were cross-professional which Clarisse and Tita found extremely beneficial to be exposed to professionals from other disciplines outside health.
Clarisse and Tita were the only non-UK residents at each course however they were warmly welcomed by lecturers and other students and felt comfortable in fully participating in group activities and making individual interventions. They thoroughly enjoyed attending their lectures and being exposed to student life in the UK.

We enjoyed studying with students from different countries and professional backgrounds. We participated fully in class. The method of teaching was a little new and we learned to use different learning aids. Our teachers are kind and patient and the other students are friendly. The learning conditions are very conducive as well.

Clarisse and Tita had this to say about their courses: The first course was a three day workshop organised by the University College London in collaboration with the Institute of Management and Leadership, and facilitated by Stuart Maddocks.
This workshop ran from 6-8 March at the University College London campus and ended with Institute of Management and Leadership (ILM) certification. Various aspects were discussed including understanding management and leadership, leadership versus management, leadership styles, approach to effective leadership and delegation, situational leadership, team leadership, building high performing teams and managing performance, influencing others, team action and team work, team evolution, managing change, communication, action plans, responses to change, managing change, and effective communication skills.

The second and third were part time modules at Birkbeck University of London. These courses ran weekly on Fridays (six hours each Friday) for six consecutive weeks and were part of the modules for the undergraduate program in Management. The modules were leadership and team building and managing change, facilitated by Adrian Wards and Michele Beute respectively: both lecturers at Birkbeck. The modules covered different aspects of leadership and management including: definition of terms, differences between leadership and management, leadership theories, leadership models, team building, communication skills, management of change, and resistance to change. Learning was evaluated through assignments in which students were expected to produce 1000 words on practical leadership and management in their organisations.

The teaching methodologies in these courses were new to the fellows, but very practical and effective. The above courses were interspersed with lots of group and learner centred activities which were again new to the fellows, however very efficient, effective and enjoyable method of teaching.

(b) Communication and networking

Both Clarisse and Tita had excellent verbal communication skills in English and French. The focus of their Fellowship was therefore on written communication.

One of their tasks was to develop a website for the Cameroon Nurses Association. This involved examining other websites to determine the best structure for Cameroon; gathering information, and where it was not available, developing the information; liaising with their colleagues in Cameroon for approval and endorsement; liaising with the web developer; and becoming familiar with the software and learning how to maintain the website themselves once they returned home. The CNF provided the funds to purchase a domain name of choice, purchase web space, customise a generic website, and purchase software for maintenance of the website. A highlight of Clarisse and Tita’s fellowship was the launching of the website for the Cameroon Nurses Association: http://www.cameroonnursesassociation.org. As Cameroon is a bilingual country, the translation of all website content into French is an activity Clarisse and Tita will undertake following their fellowship.
Clarisse and Tita were also involved in producing one of the monthly editions of the CNF e-News (March 2012) where they learned the practical skills of managing columns in a publication; developing material that was attractive and informative; and structuring an e-News bulletin; skills they intend to use once they return home to produce a regular bulletin for their professional association.

Clarisse and Tita also undertook research regarding the ratification of International Labour Organisation conventions relating to nursing by Commonwealth countries in preparation for publications of an article in the CNF bi-annual journal: The Commonwealth Nurse. The article was published in Issue 45 of the journal. It was very interesting working on the ILO conventions and being able to see how important our profession is to the ILO. We were able to identify all the Commonwealth countries and conventions related to our field of work. This information is very useful to us because many nurses are not even informed with respects to this. This research also permitted us to have a better understanding to the Commonwealth family.

Networking was an important aspect of the fellowship program for Clarisse and Tita. Their first week was spent in orientation to London and to key people for information and support. Through the mentorship of Paula and Maura, Clarisse and Tita were able to visit Guildford to meet Dr Ann Gallagher and spend the day at Surrey University and attend a four hour lecture on nursing ethics.

Clarisse and Tita also had the opportunity to visit a local hospital in Oxford and expressed the wish that as part of their Fellowship program they had more exposure to the way health care was structured in the United Kingdom, a recommendation they made for future fellowships.
Paula and Maura introduced them to nurses from the West Africa diaspora in the United Kingdom. Clarisse and Tita learned a great deal from their contact with these nurses and really benefited from the contact. We had the most interesting time discussing and exchanging views about nursing in Cameroon and nursing in the UK with Dorcas Gwata. We were able to bring out differences in the practice and the reason for these difficulties which was truly educative. It was also great adventure taking a tour of the Wellcome Collection with her.

Given any contacts, Clarisse and Tita took the initiative to follow them, finding their own way around London using public transport, and demonstrating exceptional maturity and a real commitment to the purpose of their fellowship.

We had a very interesting meeting with Dr David Foster, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer in the UK Department of Health, to understand his role in influencing government policies regarding nursing practice. This meeting lasted for more than an hour and Dr David Foster underlined the need to regulate the practice of nurses as well as health care assistants, to continually monitor the quality of care, and the importance of political awareness of nurses in each country.

One of their visits was to meet the Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, Mr Vijay Krishnarayan. The Commonwealth Foundation is the intergovernmental Commonwealth organisation supporting civil society. After their visit, Clarisse and Tita commented: It was gratifying to move through the buildings of the Commonwealth Foundation, where we had the singular privilege of entering into the magnificent rooms. Seeing our very own flag flying up the sky in the garden intensified our sense of patriotism and made us realise how useful the Fellowship program is to us. The meeting with the very dynamic and loving Director and lunch offered us was quite exciting. Clarisse and Tita were very proud to see their country’s flag flying in the grounds of Marlborough House and were also very taken with the green grapes offered as part of their lunch which were a new fruit to them.
Clarisse and Tita paid a courtesy visit to the offices of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission to meet with Ms Huma Akhtar who the particularly wanted to meet because of her communication with them regarding their Fellowship. Clarisse and Tita explained that in Cameroonian culture, it is important to ‘pay your respects’ to someone who has done you a service. Clarisse and Tita reported that they were very graciously received, with Ms Akhtar taking a considerable amount of time to meet with them and ask them about their Fellowship experience and their program.

Another visit undertaking by Clarisse and Tita on their own initiative was to the offices of C3 Collaborating for Health which is an organisation focusing on the prevention of non-communicable disease: On March 5th we visited the C3 Collaborating for Health office, where we chatted with Pat Hughes and Christine Hancock, sharing experiences and talking about the prevention of non-communicable diseases and other current health care issues. In the follow up to this, we attended a very interesting breakfast seminar on environmental health organised by this organisation. We realised for the first time the impact and importance of environmental health and felt this was an area we needed to sensitise nurses on our return home.

Clarisse and Tita also paid a courtesy visit to the Cameroon High Commission. The introduction was facilitated by the Royal Commonwealth Society who, in their introduction said: I want to introduce you to the two young Commonwealth Fellows from Cameroon who have come to London representing the Commonwealth Nurses Federation. Tita and Clarisse are the two inspiring young Cameroonian who Danny and I were telling you about. I have now seen them "in action" at a couple of events here during Commonwealth Week and was impressed by their integrity, drive, charm and interest in the Commonwealth. If it is possible for you to see them while they are in London, I am sure they would be honoured to meet you.

Following the visit, Clarisse and Tita had this to say in their journal: On 27 March 2012, the Fellows paid a courtesy call to the Cameroon High Commissioner to the UK, during which they shared various issues related to the development of their country with respect to health care. The High Commissioner and the Head of Chancery expressed their satisfaction and gave advice on the need to return and serve the Cameroonian public after the Fellowship.
Clarisse and Tita were impressed and amazed at the friendly informality of their visits with senior people. Clarisse and Tita observed that, in their own country, they rarely had the opportunity to meet with senior officials and if given the opportunity, the visits were very formal and surrounded by protocol.

(c) Organisational governance and management

Clarisse and Tita were instructed in and given responsibility for routine administrative activities for the CNF such as opening and dealing with mail and banking. They enjoyed undertaking these activities and took their responsibilities seriously and performed all activities competently, enthusiastically and with good humour. They also took responsibility for the annual task of updating the CNF membership data base which involved them emailing each national nursing association in Commonwealth countries with their current details and then updating the data base with any changes once a response was received. During this activity, Clarisse and Tita became familiar with the CNF numbered filing system and realised the importance of keeping orderly and accessible records.

We were involved in the daily activities of the of the CNF, including management of correspondences, financial transactions, important meetings including those related to the inaugural conference, and getting ourselves acquainted with the wider world of the CNF and the Commonwealth. We also started the update of the CNF data base for 2012, during which we sent emails to all CNF member states to enable them update their information held in the CNF data base. In this way we were able to get in touch with all CNF members.

One of their most important activities was helping to organise the Inaugural Commonwealth Nurses Conference which was held in London 10-11 March 2012 at the Royal Commonwealth Society. The Royal College of Nursing Events Team were assisting with the organisation and Clarisse and Tita worked closely with them to learn all aspects of conference organisation. The Conference gave Clarisse and Tita exposure to many nurses across the Commonwealth and the opportunity to hear excellent presentations of high quality. Clarisse and Tita assisted with setting up and were given the responsibility for making sure that delegates were comfortable and had all the information they required. Clarisse and Tita's enthusiasm and friendliness won them many, many friends. They were also given the responsibility of looking after a special guest Siya Kulkarni, a 15 year old girl from India who had won the RCS ‘Me and My Net’ competition. Clarisse and Tita made Siya looked after Siya very well and as a consequence she became less nervous and more comfortable. Clarisse and Tita were especially happy to welcome some of their colleagues from Cameroon to the conference. Clarisse and Tita also made a presentation to the conference about their Fellowship, their objectives, their activities, their experiences, and what their plans were once they returned home. They commented that this: was a very cherished moment and shall remain memorable.
In reflecting on the conference, Tita wrote: *Meanwhile I was particularly very active and interested during the entire conference, partly because it was my first time within the group and calibre of people and owing to my desire to have as much contacts and orientation as possible for future use with the Cameroon Nurses association and as a fellow with the CNF. I had the opportunity of meeting various personalities and colleagues from other countries, discussed varied professional issues and had a wider view of the CNF and Commonwealth at large. A full sense of patriotism for their countries was running across the conference amongst the various delegations.*

Clarisse’s reflections on the conference also provide an insight into what she learned:

*The organization of the conference was very efficient with a hardworking and dedicated committee which I really admired. I was particularly happy I was able to help this committee. That filled me with a wonderful sense of belonging and usefulness. I learned a great deal about organizing and running a conference and I felt so privileged to have been involved in the planning. This was the first ever conference I attended where we had presentations going on simultaneously in different halls at the same time, yet well organized and time strictly kept. I could actually choose where to be and what to listen to and though I could not be in all the halls at the same time I did not really feel like I missed anything because I had the book of abstracts and could always talk to the presenters or ask for a copy of their work. The content was very rich. I was encouraged by the presentations of the young nurses from Singapore and challenged to go into research and never be complacent with the state of things especially at my work place. I learned that I could always do much more to make things better for staff as well as patients and doing this concurrently with my work.*

*The attendance was so impressive and the representation of the various commonwealth countries amazing. I was also struck by the fact that of all the close to 200 delegates who attended the conference only 4 were sponsored meaning all the other delegates supported themselves to come and attend the conference, or were assisted by local nurses associations or governments. This encouraged me to value meetings and conferences and work hard toward attending them. At the same time it opened my eyes to the importance of a strong and functional nurses association.*

*I met and had chatted with executives of strong nurses associations such as Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Bahamas and solicited their advice and support in nurturing the Cameroon Nurses Association and they were all very willing to help. So I am going to be working very closely with them once I get back home. I also met very inspiring nurses who are holders of PhD degrees and Doctorates. It is my dream to acquire a PhD someday. I am encouraged and I know all things are possible. If they could, then I can. This taught me to work hard and never give up on my dreams.*

*I also enjoyed the atmosphere of camaraderie despite diverse cultural backgrounds. I met people I had met in Botswana in June 2009 during the CNF Biennial and Symposium; it felt like home and they were all very kind and spoke so many encouraging words to me. It was like being with family. I am already resolved to do all I can to attend the next conference. The food was a little strange but I made do with it; maybe next time we could consider adding some African dishes to the menu to spice things up. To sum up, the conference was a great success and I am taking all I learned with me to improve on practice back home as well as nurture and develop the Cameroon Nurses Association.*
The Conference gave Clarisse and Tita an opportunity to participate in Commonwealth Week events facilitated by the Royal Commonwealth Society. On Monday 12 March, Commonwealth Day, they were among a group of people from the conference who attended the Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey hosted by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Clarisse and Tita also represented the CNF at a Commonwealth Youth Consultation Wednesday 14 March and at a reception for Siya Kulkarni (winner of the ‘Me and my Net’ competition) where they presented a cheque to Siya on behalf of the CNF for the purchase of insecticide treated nets. Another highlight of Commonwealth Week events for Clarisse and Tita was attending the Hugh Masekela concert at the Barbican. But perhaps one of the most special visits for them was to the Florence Nightingale Museum where they spent several hours enjoying the exhibits and reading more about Florence Nightingale’s contribution to nursing and health.

**EVALUATION**

Prior to the completion of their Fellowship, a formal debriefing was conducted and an opportunity provided for Clarisse and Tita to provide feedback about their experiences. They identified five key outcomes for them of the Fellowship as well as a huge range of other benefits:

* The first was their appreciation of the mentorship of Paula and Maura and how valuable that was to them.
* The second was the education and training they received at the University of Central London and Birkbeck University and how much they learned from the lecturers and the other participants.
* The third was the networking opportunities the Fellowship provided, particularly through the Inaugural Commonwealth Nurses Conference.
* The fourth was their own personal growth through all the experiences and opportunities that were provided to them during the Fellowship.
* The fifth was the opportunity that the Fellowship provided for them in the light of their experiences to take a critical look at themselves and the contribution they could make to nursing in Cameroon.

There were many other benefits they identified: the learning about managing an organisation; the invaluable experience of constructing and managing a website; researching and writing articles; putting together a newsletter; understanding a data base; meeting so many wonderful people; observing a different way of interacting with people and a different way of teaching; and just enjoying the wonderful atmosphere and excitement of being in London and visiting all the historic places they had only read about in books. The major recommendation Clarisse and Tita made was that they would have liked more exposure to clinical nursing settings and suggested that this be provided in any future Fellowships.

The CNF learned some lessons which will be valuable to us if we are successful for future Fellowships:

1. There is value in having two Fellows from the same country rather than just one Fellow. It was our observation that having a colleague from home was very supportive.

2. The short courses advertised by London universities are not offered every term so the courses you think may be available actually may not be. Fortunately there are many short courses available so it is possible to find some that are suitable.

3. There was confusion with Clarisse and Tita’s arrival in the United Kingdom and neither were met, nor realised they were to be met, by Scholarship officials at the airport. Consequently there was nearly a week delay in them being provided with their cash passports.

4. The CNF did not know to ask whether the Fellows had arranged health or travel insurance before leaving their home country. Arranging such insurance is not possible after travel has commenced. This created some anxiety for both the CNF and the fellows as neither had health insurance during their Fellowship.

5. The CNF had arranged accommodation for the Fellows however this was cancelled by the institution when the institution required the rooms for a large organisation. Other suitable accommodation was found however fortunately both Fellows had relatives or acquaintances in London with whom they could stay and this was helpful for them having someone they knew in London. This may not be the case for future Fellows and the CNF is exploring options with nursing diaspora organisations for Fellows to be accommodated in private homes.

6. The CNF office is located in the International Department of the Royal College of Nursing in London. During the Fellowship the Fellows worked from the RCN when they were not involved in education or training or other activities. At the RCN they mainly worked in the Library. Since the completion of the Fellowship, the RCN International Department has merged with the RCN Policy Department and the working arrangements would make it disruptive for Fellows to work in the Department although they would still be able to work and would be welcome to work in the Library. This is something that would need to be taken into consideration for future Fellows.
Clarisse and Tita were colleagues but not close colleagues at the beginning of the Fellowship however they worked extremely well together and were very respectful to each other and very honest with each other. They both demonstrated a maturity beyond their years. For example, Tita’s wife was in the later stages of pregnancy however he managed his Fellowship and family responsibilities throughout the Fellowship sensibly and sensitively.

Clarisse and Tita were extremely patriotic; they loved their country and had a strong commitment to working hard to improve the quality and standard of nursing care and nursing education, a commitment they had already demonstrated prior to taking up their Fellowship.

The reports written by Clarisse and Tita in Attachments 1 and 2, clearly demonstrate they are already sharing their skills with their colleagues particularly through the Cameroon Nurses Association, the website and their Facebook page. The leadership roles Clarisse and Tita currently occupy, their clear potential and the likelihood they will continue to seek, not just further education, but other positions of influence will have a catalytic effect and practical benefits for the nursing profession in Cameroon and as a consequence the people of Cameroon. Clarisse and Tita are both still young with a great future ahead of them. The CNF feels honoured to have been able to contribute in small part to their personal and professional growth and will follow their careers with interest and pride.

The CNF cannot speak too highly of the success of the Fellowship. All our objectives were met beyond our expectations. There is no doubt that Clarisse and Tita benefitted from the experience and that they are already using their skills and knowledge now they are back home. What was unexpected, was that everyone who they interacted with, benefitted also. It was refreshing and renewing and a privilege and a joy to be around these two wonderful young people.
The Commonwealth Fellowship, February to April 2012 was a life-changing opportunity for me. Travelling to the UK, to begin with, was a world of experience in itself and it changed my mentality a lot as this was my first time visiting a developed country.

During the fellowship, I was privileged to meet and work with some very creative and dynamic minds like the staff of the RCN. I learned from these people the meaning of hard work and working as a team. I also learned a big lesson of dedication from our mentors. One of the highlights of the fellowship for me was the Inaugural Commonwealth Nurses Conference. We had the opportunity of participating in the planning, running the conference and evaluation. I learned a great deal about conference organization and handling the challenges it entails. Another highlight was the two courses we took at Birkbeck and UCL on Leadership and Management and Managing Change. These courses were very timely for me as I was recently appointed to leadership positions both at the hospital where I work and in the Cameroon Nurses Association. Now I am better equipped and manage my duties better, with more confidence and I have been having better results at work.

We had the opportunity of meeting and talking to some people in strategic positions in nursing in the UK and other countries. They shared with us how they were able to raise the nursing standards in their respective countries to what it is now and what they are still doing to maintain it and make it even better. We are determined to change the face of nursing in Cameroon and their contributions and advice are greatly valued. During our fellowship we engaged in a lot of travelling and tours. We visited the University of Surrey, the Oxford General Hospital, and many tourist attractions in and out of London.

The fellowship left a great impact in my life and consequently on the nursing profession in Cameroon as a whole. I learned that change is a slow process and requires patience and hard work. I learned about resistance to change and how to deal with it. I also heard testimonies from leaders of nursing associations in countries like Ghana and South Africa which are doing really well now but which also started off with challenges similar to what we are facing in Cameroon. All these strengthened me and gave me hope for a better future for nursing and nurses in Cameroon. Since our return home, we have been having meetings with other executive members of Cameroon Nurses Association and plans are underway for a way forward for nursing in Cameroon. We have also been sharing ideas with colleagues all over Cameroon and abroad through our Facebook forum and they are excited and our numbers are growing.

I am also a better leader at work, thanks to all I learned during the fellowship. I extend my appreciation to all those who made this happen, thank you very much!
The ten weeks fellowship program ran from early February to mid April 2012, sponsored by the Commonwealth Nurses Federation and based in the United Kingdom. It gave me an opportunity to work with very specialised and highly skilled mentors and other people, learning about leadership, management and other aspect of the professional nursing life. During the fellowship, I undertook two short courses in UCL and Birkbeck, including leadership and management and managing change.

Several high profile meeting were attended with both academic and clinical staff, as well as those in top managerial positions within the Commonwealth family. This permitted me to gather lots of information on organisational management and governance which help me re-examine my career goals. At the CNF secretariat, basic managerial tasks were performed, as were assigned. Several tourist visits were made to Sheffield, Guildford and Oxford, to meet with either our mentors or other high profile people. A visit to the Oxford Hospital centre gave me an opportunity to learn new things about unit management, infection control, organization of nursing services and other basic and middle line nursing functions. The value of these visits was amazing and a life time experience. I was fully involved in the organization of the 2012 Inaugural Commonwealth Nurses Conference, during which I meet various nurse leaders in different countries, some of whom I still communicate with.

The fellowship generally was a life and career changing experience. It gave me an opportunity to re-examine my call as a professional nurse and decide where I want to take my career and most importantly how I can positively influence the nursing profession in Cameroon at individual and collective levels. The importance or worth of the experience is immeasurable to me as an individual nurse and to the Cameroon Nurses Association or nursing profession at large.

The benefits of this experience are far reaching both at individual and group levels. Clarisse and I were able to assist in the development of a website for the Cameroon Nurses Association, with the support of the CNF. We were also established a virtual forum for Cameroon nurses, where they meet and discuss issues pertaining to all aspects of nursing practice in Cameroon. Upon return, we have been able to instil a new spirit of professional consciousness, commitment, and devotion in our fellow colleagues, who now see their roles to expand far beyond the client bed side. They now perceive more than ever the need for positive change within the profession, which is the first step in a successful change process. Many other concrete projects are still incubating, being planned in collaboration with other key players, regardless of the numerous obstacles the Cameroonian nurses are more than ever conscious of their responsibilities and are moving gradually toward progress.

I will take this opportunity to extent my heartfelt appreciation to the CNF, to all my mentors, the RCN staff and other persons connected in one way or another to the successful completion of this fellowship program. I am truly grateful for your assistance, time and love. I am indebted to you all.
It was an honour to be asked by the Commonwealth Nurses Federation to mentor two ‘rising stars’ Clarisse and Tita; selected from the body of the Cameroon nursing workforce. It provided an opportunity for me to share my professional knowledge and expertise and my love for my city of Sheffield. In return I learned about Cameroon and the challenges for its people and the nurses who serve them and it also provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my own nursing points of view.

The day we spent together in Sheffield was very wet, but undaunted we made the most of it. The aim was twofold: firstly to provide a cultural and social orientation to a northern city and secondly to experience and exchange professional viewpoints. Through a structured discussion on ‘who or what controls nurses and nursing’, and fuelled by coffee, we compared and contrasted the nursing profession in the Cameroon and the United Kingdom.

In the afternoon a visit to Chatsworth in the Peak District National Park for lunch provided a complete contrast to the rural settings in the Cameroon. We concluded the day with a visit to my house for an English cup of tea. It was an opportunity to meet and discuss with my husband, who manages a NHS General Practice, the policies, practices and challenges of delivering community health care in Sheffield. Overall a very busy, but I believe, a very fruitful day.
It was an honour to provide mentorship to Clarisse and Tita, the two recipients of the 2012 Commonwealth Fellowship during their time in England. Both students were clearly eager to make full use of the opportunity offered by the Fellowship and to gain new knowledge and skills that could be of value in their own environment. They were open to all suggestions offered about places to visit or individuals they should meet. We met together mostly on a weekly basis and they always provided me with timely information on their progress.

Both students were very sociable and made the responsibility for mentoring them a real pleasure. As I live in Oxford, my proximity to London (one hour by train) made the effort of having face to face contact relatively easy and perhaps an important consideration for the future.

Clarisse and Tita diligently followed up the personal contacts that I offered to them. As a result they were able to meet with some key nursing leaders who could introduce them to some of the wider aspects of health care in the UK and globally. These contacts included Dr Ann Gallagher, Director for International Nursing Ethics at the University of Surrey; Christine Hancock, former ICN President, and currently Founding and Director C3 Collaboration for Health, a London based charity focussing on issues around global impact of non-communicable disease; and David Foster, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer, Department of Health, London.

A London based colleague, Dorcas Gwata, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Mental Health, and originally from Zimbabwe, invited the students to her home for dinner. I thought it interesting for them to meet with a nurse from an African country, to learn something about her experience of working here and how she continues to connect with her homeland.

Toward the end of their stay, Clarisse and Tita came to visit me in Oxford. Besides showing them a very beautiful city, at short notice I was able to take them to the university teaching hospital where I had worked. They visited a couple of clinical areas to meet some nursing staff and were able to discuss issues around nursing care. Staff in the wards willingly provided the students with copies nursing documentation to take away with them.

There is one key observation I would make about their programme. Given that the Fellowship was focussed around nursing, I feel it would have been useful for more time to be spent observing practice in a variety of clinical areas, including primary care. It was only late in the programme that I realised that Clarisse and Tita had not actually visited any clinical area thus the last minute visit to the Oxford Hospital.

Overall I feel the Fellowship was an excellent opportunity for Tita and Clarisse to enrich their thinking about health care delivery and to develop them personally. I see great leadership potential in both students and hope that they can use the lessons learned here to make a difference to the nursing profession in Cameroon.

Maura Buchanan