



JEANETTE HAWKINS

UK

Jeanette Hawkins is the Chief Nurse at the [Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group](#), funded by [Young Lives vs Cancer](#).

As the Chief Nurse, she works across both organisations providing insight, advocacy and leadership in children's cancer nursing.

Jeanette trained in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corp and later joined the NHS. She worked at Birmingham Children's Hospital (BCH) in Children's Cancer services for 25 years, with 12 of these years as Lead Cancer Nurse, where she completed an Masters in Science (MSC) in Advanced Nursing Practice.

Jeanette pioneered a number of service developments at BCH, including nurse prescribing, advanced practice, and family-centred models of care. Other achievements include the NICE Neutropenic Sepsis Guideline Group, Deputy Chair of West Midlands Children's Cancer Network Coordinating Group and two terms on the RCN Paediatric Oncology Nursing Forum Steering Group. She supported the adaptation of the adult cancer Telephone Triage Toolkit to a paediatric version with a published article on this project. Jeanette has other publications relating to CYP cancer.

More recently, Jeanette project managed the review of the 'Career and Education Framework for CYP cancer nursing' 3rd edition. In 2018, Jeanette visited Myanmar with [World Child Cancer](#) to support developments in specialist play. Jeanette joined [Super Shoes](#) as a Trustee and volunteer painter in October 2022.

"I am the river that is often quiet and still, offers nourishment to those who choose to visit, seeps into gaps unnoticed, can be difficult to contain and is sometimes a powerful force"

On Relationships that Influenced My Career

I think all of us are helpfully influenced by so many people across the span of our lives. Sometimes, the smallest of interactions with a person makes a lasting impact on you. It's easy to look towards more experienced, more senior, more well-known or prominent influential people, and of course, I have been positively guided by many of them. Some of these beacons of light spotted my talents and skills (even when I couldn't see them), encouraged me, pushed me, and guided me (often when they weren't aware of it). I'm cautiously naming people as I'm sure to miss some: Mrs. Spencer (my English teacher at school), Sue Woodhouse (Ward Sister at BCH), Moira Bradwell (Day Care Manager at BCH), Rachel Hollis (RCN and SIOP colleague), Dara de Burca (Social Work Director), Faith Gibson (Researcher), Julia Chisholm and Pam Kearns (Consultant Oncologists), Ashley Ball-Gamble (CEO). They stand out because they exhibited 'generosity of leadership,' meaning they gave their time, trust, and knowledge freely that helped facilitate development opportunities.

In some ways, though, the most important influencers were my peers, juniors, children with cancer and their families. These were the wonderful people who taught me the job. The role models, the educators, the ones who gave critical challenge, often kindly and sometimes harshly. Subtle nods of approval, nurturing words, or a flash of disapproval would usually steer me to a new understanding of a situation. I couldn't possibly pick out names here (far too many to mention) but dear colleagues past and present, children, young people and families, you know who you are (and if you doubt I mean you, if we worked together or interacted professionally you will be on my list). I owe such a debt of gratitude to everyone.

On Challenges and Overcoming Them

In 2000, when our children were aged 2 and 4 years, I was diagnosed with cancer. As a child, my mother had left home when we were young and I'd vowed that if I ever had children, I would never leave them, and then cancer came and threatened to do just that. It came close on the back of previous periods of maternity leave and returning to work after treatment was harder than I allowed myself to recognize at the time. I felt disconnected from the team and there were patients I knew nothing about but whom my colleagues knew well. I continued my MSC during treatment. When I returned, I was trying to establish a completely new role in the service. I don't think we were as good then at recognizing or supporting mental health in the workplace, so I just pushed on and worked through it. I'm much more aware these days of checking what other pressures colleagues have in their lives.

The second biggest challenge came because of COVID. I was working for Young Lives vs. Cancer and had an exquisitely

experienced team of nurse educators who were going out into local hospitals to educate and teach clinical skills so that families could access more care closer to home. We had the report on a two-year, externally-assessed service evaluation which showed excellent results. COVID lockdowns meant that charity income dropped significantly, and we had to streamline services. I had to make my team redundant, and it was a soul-destroying thing to do. I usually trust resilience to get me through things but for the first time, I reached out and had some coaching during this time. This was immensely valuable and allowed me share confidentially my thoughts and feelings. I would absolutely recommend coaching for anyone going through a difficult situation at work to help get perspective and self-care.

On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

Without doubt my husband and children have been the biggest support in enabling my career. My husband carries the lion's share of household chores assisting my work focus. I can easily be a workaholic so it's important for me to balance that. We have two Airedale dogs who make sure I get out for a long walk every day. We love being in the countryside and camping holidays with the dogs in beautiful parts of Britain. To keep myself active, I have also practiced Tai Chi and Qi Gong for the last 15 years. I love the combination of mental challenge, learning the forms and martial arts interpretation, the physical benefits of whole-body movement and the meditative elements where you become completely absorbed in something other than daily pressures.

I enjoy water-colour painting. I've had to adapt to acrylic painting more recently since I joined SuperShoes and am learning to paint on canvas. I've completed my first pair of shoes for a child with cancer and hope to do much more of this when I retire and have more time. It's been interesting too, researching characters to paint that the children request.

My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

I am an extreme introvert. Leadership isn't something I sought out at 25, although it seemed to keep finding me! Later in life, I learned about the personality profile of 'confident introverts.' The advice I would have given my younger self is to embrace who you are and learn how to use it. Learn what exhausts you and what nourishes you in order to help you stay in balance. I also often found myself thinking differently from others. I used to think it was me that didn't quite understand the world the way others seemed to. My older self now knows that sometimes, I was just seeing it ahead of others due to foresight and horizon scanning. So now I'd say: "don't be afraid of showing your passions and stick to what you believe in."