

Citation for William Pooley

Will Pooley was the first British nurse to contract Ebola. He had always wanted to work in Africa and thus went to Sierra Leone in 2014 with a small, local NGO, The Shepherd's Hospice, having just completed the Diploma in Tropical Nursing. He went there with very little support to help strengthen palliative care services. He lived in difficult conditions and showed a great deal of determination and compassion in taking on this role as the only international volunteer. When he heard about the terrible situation with Ebola at Kenema Hospital in the summer of 2014, he travelled there on his own and volunteered at the Ebola Isolation Unit at Kenema Government Hospital in the east of Sierra Leone. He worked with a team of Sierra Leonean staff, many who also became infected and over 30 of whom died. Kenema was one of the worst affected districts in the early stages of the outbreak. The small team of nurses who were working on the ward were doing so under extraordinarily difficult conditions. They and the local cleaning staff – who do all the dirty and dangerous work – carried on tirelessly and often faced enormous personal sacrifice. Many were stigmatised for working with Ebola patients and were thrown out of their homes. They are doing a job that other people would refuse to do, but which has helped to save hundreds of lives and protect hundreds more from the disease.

Will contracted Ebola six weeks after starting to work at Kenema. He was flown out of Sierra Leone and treated at the Royal Free Hospital in London where he made a complete recovery. He returned to Freetown to continue his work on the Ebola response, this time at Connaught Hospital in Freetown. It is this act of courage that brought Will to prominence: he embodied the criteria for this Award 'to be presented to any nurse in recognition of an outstanding commitment to human rights and exemplifying the essence of nursing's philosophy of humanity'.

Will is not only an Ebola nurse but now an Ebola survivor. His immunity allows him to do his job with a lesser degree of risk and gives him a unique empathy towards patients. Several of his Sierra Leonean colleagues have had the same experience, whereby they have contracted Ebola, then returned to work on the ward after recovering. These people are unparalleled in their courage and commitment to end this disease. While much international media coverage is focused on the international response, it is the Sierra Leonean staff who are at the heart of the ongoing efforts to end Ebola. Collectively they represent an extraordinary group of heroes who are the absolute exemplars of the very best of the nursing profession, due to their enduring professionalism, compassion, tireless working, sacrifice and humility. Will is the 'face' of Ebola for many people in Britain, but the colleagues who have supported his Award were keen to stress that the whole team at Connaught Hospital should be acknowledged and honoured, with Will collecting the Award on their behalf.

What is not in the Citation but is of significance is that Will will be making a trip to the Queen soon to receive a MBE. This is one of the regular Honours given to members of the public at the New Year and on the Queen's official birthday on 15 June. This is a public honour for Will, but the Human rights and Nursing Award, but ours was published and given first! We certainly congratulate Will on being honoured in this way, and for nursing getting such a high profile.