

ProNurse Interviews: Claire Westwood, Happy Nurse and Life Coach for Nurses

Claire has a close association with ProNurse having been one of our featured writers from the beginning. She has just had her book 'The Happy Nurses Guide to Creating a Balanced Life' published so we got our hands on a copy and gave her a grilling about it.

PN: A quick look through your book or web site is enough to be sure that you do live up your Happy Nurse name, but you explain how that was not always the case. What was it that made you take the first steps to making yourself happy?

CW: I got to the stage when I realised that I was worth more than feeling 'burned out' and that it was down to me to make changes. I discovered a 'life coaching' book and it allowed me to look at my life and to make some changes to my life. This started with adding some singing lessons and this tapped into a different part of me that I had forgotten about and it become the best hour of my week!

PN: People who have taken to life coaching can be very irritating to others! They talk about achieving goals, doing the things they always wanted to do and things that frightened the life out of them, but felt amazing afterwards. If it is so easy why don't we all do it?

CW: It isn't easy - the principles are *simple* and if you do them regularly (like everything) they get much *easier*. Knowing we can achieve small things gives us the experience and confidence to achieve more. My first goal was to find a singing teacher and now one of mine is to do a book tour of the UK - so very different goals over a long time period.

PN: Nursing is potentially a stressful occupation as you are caring for other people and their problems when you may have your own problems to deal with. Do you think that nurses are more in need of life coaching than other professions?

CW: I do, yes. The demands on nurses are huge and they are trained to care for others all the time. I appreciate that other professions have their own stresses but I believe the way nurses are as people and the training they receive does not help them - they often put everyone else first until they are so burned out they can't function any more.

PN: To turn the tables from your book. Here are some questions that you ask that we'd like to hear the answers for:

What makes your soul light up?

CW: Music, learning, coaching and teaching others, being with my family and friends, having some breakthrough with my clients, meeting new people, travelling to beautiful places - a long list!

PN: You urge people to take at least one action a day to improve their lives. What action have you taken today (and you can't say this interview!), what did you do yesterday? What are your plans for tomorrow?

CW: My action for today - one was to run for 30 mins - I am training for a 10km run in September, and tomorrow I will be also doing fitness but also organising more of the book tour. My whole life (and yours) has been created one action per day - it's the actions you take that make the difference!

PN: What frustrates you?

CW: People who stay 'stuck' and like to be victims instead of doing something. I know how amazing life could be for them. Looking for all the reasons why things 'can't be done' instead of all the benefits to doing things differently. Lots of small things - **burocracy** that stops people being creative and fulfilled at work. Targets for nurses focussing on the things that are not the most important to them.

PN: If you could do anything what would it be?

CW: I would love to change the face of nursing to a more fulfilling, compassionate role!

PN: What kinds of things can you do if you have a close friend or family member that tends to act as a 'drain' and take away your fun? There may be times when you can't simply walk away.

CW: I agree. There are other techniques you can use. Start by giving some positive feedback to anything you want to see more of - let them know what it is you want. If you wait for them to change you may have a long wait! Lead by example - be happy and positive and it will start to rub off. Praise and thank people and they will respond differently to you.

PN: You say in the book that A Time to Think by Nancy Kline (a book on really listening to people) gives you goosebumps. Why did it evoke such a strong reaction?

CW: The methods used and the stories of how listening deeply changed the connection between the people in the case studies and also the results they got. It shows the power of words.

PN: You mention a few times in the book that cutting down on TV viewing or even cutting it out can really help in making you happier. However, for many people watching television is their main form of entertainment and relaxation. Is this an unpopular suggestion to most people?

CW: It can be. Studies show that TV leaves the viewer more depressed than when they started and it is also a 'passive form of relaxation'. Some TV can be uplifting but why would you do something that makes you feel worse? It is a habit which can drain years from your life instead of spending the time doing something more active to relax.

PN: Another potential hiccup in the quest to be 'happy' is improving health by having a healthy diet and taking exercise. This is a step too far for many people living a 'normal' life. Do you find it a difficult point in the process for your clients?

CW: All sorts of people fit healthy activities into a 'normal' life. I kept myself fit and healthy even when I was a nurse because I made it important. You are what you eat and if you feed your body rubbish, that is what you get! Controversial? Maybe, but this is where we need to look at the results we are getting and how we feel - does what you do make you feel fabulous or not - the choice is yours!

PN: You've taken quite extreme steps to improve your confidence; walking on hot coals, doing stand up comedy and a parachute jump. What's the most extreme thing one of your clients has done?

CW: My clients often have different goals and are less likely to do these extreme activities unless they really want to. One is planning an adult 'gap year' which I am sure will include these sorts of activities!

PN: Finally, if someone was going to improve one area of their life what area would usually provide the most benefit?

CW: Health as it underpins everything - confidence, fitness, energy, vitality and self-esteem!

About Claire Westwood and happynurses



Claire Westwood RGN, RSCN, BA (Hons) Health Studies, Dip Life Coaching, NLP Practitioner, NLP Master Practitioner is the founder of happynurses.co.uk.

Claire created happynurses to help other healthcare professionals find a job they really love that suits who they are.

You can register for Claire's 'Find a Job You Love' webinars at www.happynurses.co.uk.