

THE HISTORY OF THE NURSE'S CAP

Nursing caps have a history that not very many people know about. Florence Nightingale was the woman who thought that nurses deserved to be appreciated in a more professional sense, and therefore brought nursing into education. In turn, nursing uniforms were made. The nursing students wore uniforms and upon graduation, they would attend a ceremony in which they received a nursing cap. The nursing cap then would signify the fact that the nurses were educated in their field of work. The caps weren't for this single purpose though. Nursing uniforms were donned with nursing caps that would have a colored band to show

what school they attended and what level of nursing they have acquired. There are many people who believe that the band on a nursing cap originally signified the death of Florence Nightingale in 1910.

There have been many styles of nursing uniforms through the centuries that would eventually change over time and the cap would fade out of the profession of nursing entirely. Some of the styles that caps took on were derived from nuns. This would show femininity and obedience. A few of the earlier styles were fashioned after a nun's veil and these were commonly known as "dust or muffin" caps. These were made to cover most



of a nurse's head and hair. These caps also had to be starched and pressed in order to keep their shape and appearance of nursing uniforms. Through passing years and ever-changing social standards, the larger caps were refashioned to be made easier to wear and clean. Caps became much smaller, covered less hair, and became known as a "handkerchief" hat. The women would fold and starch their own caps out a man's handkerchief. Then came the "graduate nurse cap" that was given to them at their graduation ceremony. These caps were mass-produced and eliminated the need to make a cap from a handkerchief. The caps were at one point (1950s) made of paper so they could be disposable.

As men became more likely to enter the profession of nursing, the visual idea of a nursing uniform took on even more changes and so did the caps. Men were not fond of the idea of being required to wear a cap with their nursing uniforms because of the "handmaiden" appearance that would be perceived from the general public. Men,

however, didn't have to wear caps to adhere to the social standard at the time, and the caps would phase out as uniform scrubs became more and more common in the nursing practice. Uniform scrubs also became designed with a more unisex approach.

Around 1971 the requirements for the caps disappeared and there were many schools which no longer had nursing caps associated with their schools any more. Uniform scrubs would become much more flamboyant and display more personality as the medical institutions no longer thought that white uniforms were more hygienic. In order to continue displaying the nursing alma mater the educational institutions would begin awarding their graduates with a nursing pin. With this pin, the nursing professionals would no longer have the need to bother with the care and cleaning of the caps, and would still be able to proudly display their education and school with ease. Even though caps are not required, some medical facilities still allow them to be a part of the uniforms as an optional piece.