



Scientist of the Month



September 2024

Florence Nightingale 1820 - 1910

Florence Nightingale was the founder of modern nursing, and became known as the Lady with the Lamp. Florence Nightingale was British but was born in the city of Florence, Italy, on 12 May 1820. At the time that Florence was a child, most girls didn't go to school. They were expected to help at home and then get married when grown up. However, her father was keen for his daughters to learn, and gave them lessons in lots of different subjects, including science, history and maths. Florence wanted to become a nurse. Nursing was not a respectful profession and, what's more, hospitals were filthy, horrible places where sick people died – so her parents were worried and tried to dissuade her.

After training Florence worked in London and helped improve hospitals there. She then went to nurse at a camp at the Crimean War. When she arrived the hospitals were dirty and the men were becoming even more ill whilst there. Florence knew that the soldiers could only get well again if the hospital conditions improved. With funds from back home, she bought better medical equipment and decent food, and paid for workmen to clear the drains. Together with her team, she cleaned the wards, set up a hospital kitchen and provided the wounded soldiers with quality care – bathing them, dressing their wounds and feeding them. As a result of all the improvements, far fewer soldiers were dying from disease. When Florence returned to England in 1856, newspapers wrote about her work in the Crimea, and people thought of her as a heroine.

Even though the war was over, there was still work to be done. She wrote letters to important people telling them what was wrong with Army hospitals, and in September 1856 she met with Queen Victoria to discuss ways to improve military medical systems. Huge reform took place – the Army started to train doctors, hospitals became cleaner and soldiers were provided with better clothing, food and care. In 1860, the Nightingale Training School for Nurses opened at St Thomas's Hospital in London.

In 1907, Florence became the first woman to receive the Order of Merit, an award given by the queen for super-special work.

Florence Nightingale died in 1910, but she will forever be recognised as the founder of modern nursing.



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