

MEDIA RELEASE

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Royal standard for health help by text nurse

A Leicestershire school nurse has been granted the prestigious title of Queen's Nurse for her role in transforming the way young people can access NHS healthcare.

Caroline Palmer (28), from Narborough, a school nurse at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, launched *ChatHealth* in schools earlier this year. The service enables students to contact a school nurse for help and advice by sending a message, rather than waiting to visit a weekly clinic in school.

Caroline has been recognised for her commitment to the safety and quality of the messaging service which is available to nearly 100,000 students aged 11-19 in full time education in Leicestershire. She has trained and supported colleagues whilst introducing new ways of working and has been noted for her leadership, enthusiasm, professionalism and attention to detail.

"I feel honoured to be acknowledged like this," says Caroline. "Today's teenagers are a smartphone generation – so it's important to us that we provide appropriate ways for them to get help with their health. It's great that the Queen's Nurse Institute has recognised how significant this is."

Young people who use the service say they are more likely to ask for advice from a qualified professional now they have the option of asking questions anonymously - they say it can be less embarrassing to talk about difficult issues in writing and often make initial contact by text message before seeing a nurse in person. Since *ChatHealth* was introduced, more young people have been accessing help from nurses, including more boys, who are traditionally less likely to ask for health advice.

"Caroline has demonstrated the highest integrity and compassion when dealing with extremely sensitive issues for very vulnerable young people," says Maggie Clarke, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust's Senior Nurse Professional Lead for School Nursing. "She has enabled young people in very challenging situations obtain help and improve their circumstances."

School nurses can support children and young people with enquiries relating to a wide range of health and wellbeing issues including self-harm and bullying, drug and alcohol use, smoking, healthy eating, sexual health and mental health. Caroline is now involved in a new project to reach more young people in special schools and behaviour support schools, using mobile technology.

“The work school nurses do is vitally important in keeping people in good health,” says Ernie White, cabinet member for public health at Leicestershire County Council, which helps to fund the school nurse messaging service. “We know that if we successfully engage with school pupils, they will be more likely to take an interest in their own wellbeing, which will help them stay well for much longer as they grow older.”

Caroline will receive her title at a ceremony in London in October. There are only around 500 Queen’s Nurses across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The title is given to individual community nurses who have demonstrated their high level of commitment to patients and improving practice. The title was used from around 1889, when the Queen’s Nurse Institute was created, until about 1968. It was reintroduced in 2007.



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Note to editors

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) provides a range of health and wellbeing services mainly for people living Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The Trust serves a population of one million, has a budget in excess of £282 million and employs approximately 5,400 staff. For more information visit www.leicspart.nhs.uk.

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