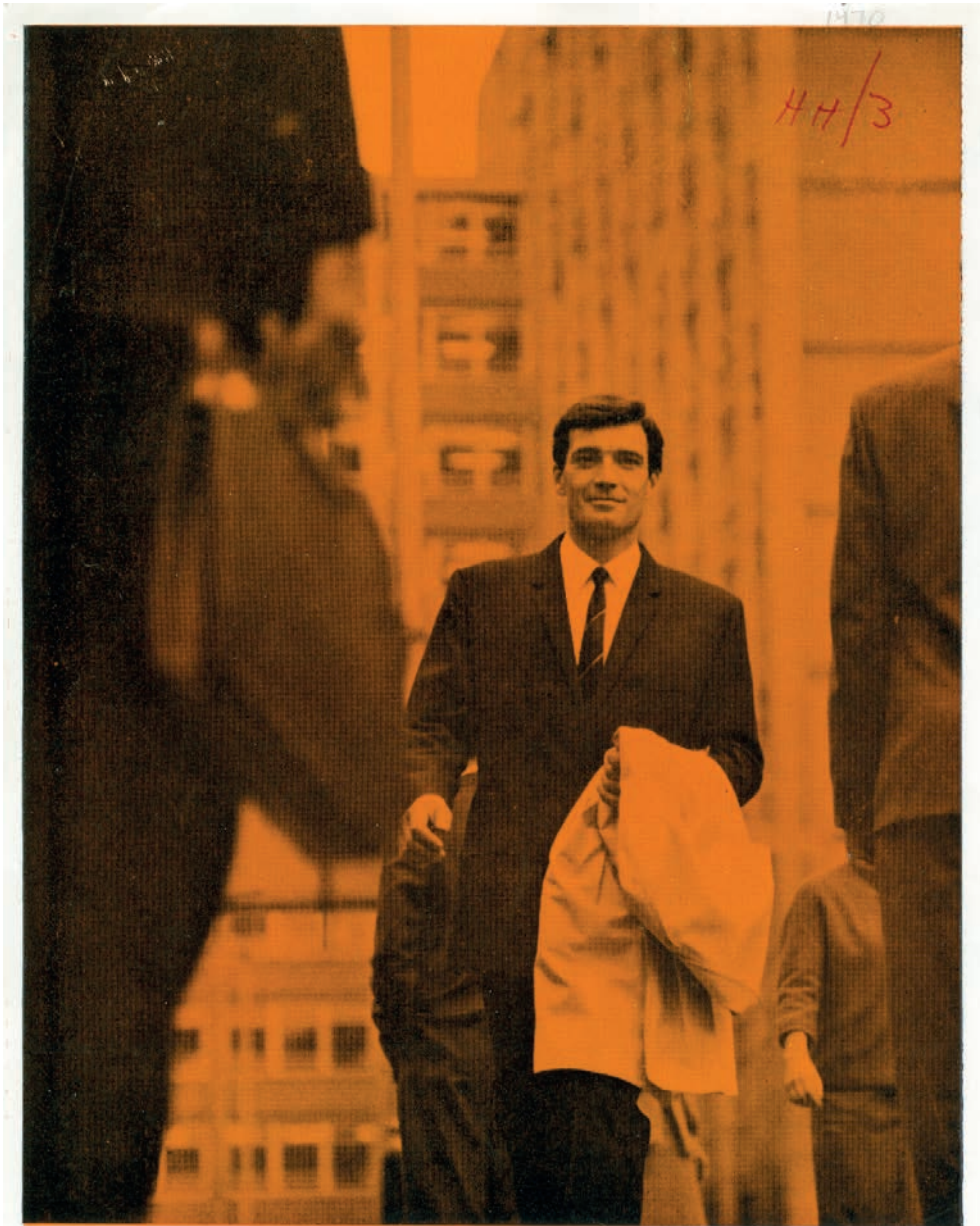


# THE IMAGE OF NURSING

## 3: Men in nursing



**He's stepping out in a  
career that's different**

**“He's stepping out in a career that's different” leaflet**  
1970, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office



Royal College of Nursing

# THE IMAGE OF NURSING

## 3: Men in nursing

### Promoting a career in nursing to men

The image is clear: this man wearing a suit is a professional. The text on this leaflet confounds the reader's expectations; the "career that's different" is nursing. It goes on to invite men to "serve others, lead an interesting life and have an assured future." Nursing is promoted as a career choice that offers status, prospects, security, and a good salary.

In 1970 nursing was widely seen as a job for women. However, nursing has never been an exclusively female profession in Britain.

### Gender prejudices before the Second World War

At the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of civilian male nurses worked in mental hospitals (psychiatric hospitals), and received very little training. As a result, male nurses were regarded as less qualified and of lower status than female nurses. This established a gender stereotype within nursing: men worked in mental nursing, women worked in general nursing.

Men who attempted to move into general nursing met resistance. Most hospital matrons thought it was inappropriate for men to nurse female

patients; and many suspected that male nursing students would upset or seduce the female students. Some general nursing courses refused to accept male students.

### The rise of male nurses after the war

During the Second World War, male and female nurses were brought together by the military services, and worked together successfully. After the war, many male military nurses looked for nursing jobs when they returned to civilian life. Facing a nurse shortage, the Ministry of Health encouraged the employment of more male nurses in both mental and general nursing. The ministry also arranged for a one-year training course for men leaving military service to qualify them for nursing quickly.

The number of trained male nurses employed full-time by the NHS rose slowly to 12,145 in 1955; men representing 10% of nurses. By 1960, when men were allowed to become members of the Royal College of Nursing, the number of male nurses was continuing to gradually rise. However, the gender divide remains uneven. In 2015, 11.2% of nurses and health care workers employed by the NHS were men.

### Activity

Would you have recognised the man on the card as a nurse? What does the design of this leaflet suggest about assumptions about gender in this period? Working in pairs, compare this image with that on the 'Nursing

Angels' card (no. 2). In what ways are men and women portrayed differently in health care and medicine? Consider what has changed and what has stayed the same between 1916 and 1970.

**Fact:** The first nursing school, in India in 250 BC, allowed only men to be nurses.

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