

# Florence Nightingale



Canada Health Day is dedicated to recognizing developments and successes occurring in public health and public health care fields. In addition, Canada Health Day allows reflection on past health accomplishments, appreciation for the people who deliver health services, and consideration for future health needs and health system capacity.

May 12<sup>th</sup> is also historically significant as it commemorates an important date in the evolution of health care and health systems – the birthday of Florence Nightingale.

Florence Nightingale died in 1910 at the age of 90, but lives on through her legacy and influence. Her life, a story of personal commitment and sacrifice to improve the health and welfare of all people, has also been an example for health professionals around the world for more than a century.

Serving in the Crimean War between 1854 and 1856 as nurse-in-charge at the military hospital in Scutari, Turkey, Florence Nightingale spent most of her time in the wards. She is known to have alleviated the pain and suffering of many wounded British soldiers with tireless devotion to their health and personal comfort. It is said that there was scarcely a man to whom she did not personally attend. It was during this time that she became known as Lady of the Lamp. She was conferred the title of general superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment of the Military Hospitals of the Army on March 16, 1856, overseeing the welfare of the British Army in Turkey.

Nightingale returned to England in mid-1856 and continued her efforts to improve the health and living conditions of the British soldier through official actions. As a result of her efforts, a Royal Commission on the Health of the Army was struck in May 1857. Later that year, the Army Medical School was established as a consequence of the Commission's activities.

Perhaps the most recognized contribution to public health by Florence Nightingale was the establishment of the Nightingale School for Nurses at St. Thomas's Hospital, England in 1860 – a world first. Through this institution, Nightingale created a training program for midwives and for nurses in workhouse infirmaries. She became the first woman to receive the Order of Merit in 1907 – another world first.



The Canadian Healthcare Association and the Canadian Public Health Association are proud of the tradition – established by Florence Nightingale – and carried on since 1981 by Canada Health Day.