

Learning for Life: Kiran Rama, Registered Psychiatric Nurse

May 31, 2018



HSA REPORT MAGAZINE, JUNE 2018

National Nursing Week was celebrated from May 7-13, marking the important contribution nurses make to our health care system. Registered psychiatric nurses work on interdisciplinary teams in a variety of health care settings, including psychiatric units in hospitals, community mental health centres, and on community outreach teams.

“Learning is continuous,” says Kiran Rama, an HSA member engager, site-steward, and registered psychiatric nurse (RPN) at St. Paul’s Hospital. That’s the message she has for HSA members who may need some encouragement when it comes to getting involved with their union.

“HSA is an awesome and inclusive union,” she said. “The opportunities that I have received from HSA have helped me become the person that I am today. They have allowed me so much growth in my professional and

daily life.”

Rama is the type of person who really embraces growth opportunities when they present themselves. It’s one of the qualities that makes her a force to be reckoned with.

She first got involved in HSA in 2014 when a colleague encouraged her to become a steward. “I was told there were a lot of opportunities – educational opportunities – that HSA had.” She said being involved in HSA is also an opportunity to do something about workers’ rights.

In 2016, she became more involved in member engagement work, visiting members at worksites, sharing HSA materials, and connecting with members about their concerns and workload issues. She also gave support to the leadership team at her worksite’s stewards’ office.

For Rama, there is something special about connecting with her fellow members.

“The work that I’ve done connecting with members and meeting new members has felt very valuable. Being a young member of HSA, it is nice to be out there meeting young members and letting them know that there are fun opportunities to get involved within HSA, rather than being just a steward,” said Rama.

In many ways, being a member engager is about meeting people where they’re situated. This is the same approach Rama takes to her work as an RPN.

“I love working with a diversity of patients, helping people, and meeting them where there are at in their mental and physical health.”

Rama has been working at St. Paul’s Hospital ever since she graduated in 2012 from Douglas College, completing a bachelor’s degree in Psychiatric Nursing. She works full-time in St. Paul’s inpatient psychiatric unit, focusing on inpatient care, inpatient adult psychiatry, and eating disorders.

She said she became an RPN because she has an interest in psychology and helping others.

“Someone had recommended psychiatric nursing to me, and at the time I was quite young. I wasn’t too familiar with what psychiatric nursing really entailed,” said Rama.

“And then I kind of just went for it.”

The work is not without its obstacles, however. Rama said that one of her major challenges as an RPN is responding to her patients’ fluctuating acuity. She sometimes has to deal with challenging behaviours, including substance abuse and misuse, and violence and aggression.

The hospital’s experienced staff, the work of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee, and the OH&S support provided by HSA help to mitigate safety risks at her workplace.

Despite the difficulties, Rama said she is so thankful she pursued her degree. “I specifically love working at St. Paul’s. I love my colleagues. It’s a great, supportive environment.”

“I love the teaching and learning opportunities that are available.”

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