

Community Nursing 2016: The only qualified teacher with Down syndrome in the world: Shéri Brynard

Shéri Brynard¹

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With this presentation, an Afrikaans speaking woman of 33 will inform the meeting in English or Afrikaans how she grew up as a girl with Down syndrome in South Africa. She will explain how her determination to make the best of her situation helped her to cope with her disability and how she, with the help of her parents, handled the preconceived ideas of the people of her time. She will illustrate how a sense of humour and positive outlook on life helped her to achieve against all odds. She made the words and the philosophy of Nelson Mandela “you are the master of your destiny and you are the captain of your soul”, as her own life philosophy. She truly believes that one must never focus on what you don't have, but be proud of who you are. She strongly believes one must work hard to make the best of who you are. Shéri Brynard gives meaning to her life by trying to change people's perceptions about people with Down syndrome in South Africa and abroad. She also tries to help the so called normal people who listen to her to focus on the positive things in their own lives. The central idea is that anyone has the potential to become a leader in the field where that person can make a difference, if you use every opportunity to the best of your ability. A legacy is cultivated by making the best of your situation, whatever it may be rising above your constraints by striving for excellence and working hard to realise your true potential. A leader inspires others to do the same and does not give up hope, ever. This is what Sheri Brynard did. Numerous studies have shown that virtually 100% of people with Down syndrome will have the plaques and tangles in the brain associated with Alzheimer's disease (e.g. Zigman et al., 1993, 19, 41-70) but not necessarily the actual symptomatic disease. How many people with Down syndrome will develop the symptomatic Alzheimer's disease needs additional research. One study from 1989 indicates that between 20-55% of people with Down syndrome will develop symptomatic Alzheimer's disease before the age of 50 (i.e. Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities, Haveman et al., 15, 241-255)..

Research suggests that both the thyroid and a lower metabolic rate contribute to people with Down syndrome being overweight. This lower metabolic rate means that children with Down syndrome burn fewer calories overall compared to a typical child and need to need to exercise more to burn off the same number of calories. It is important for everyone to eat right and exercise.

Foot Note: This work is partly presented at event of the 6th World Congress on Community Nursing, June 20-21, 2016, at Cape Town, South Africa