



International Nurses Day 2005

Nurses for Patient Safety: Targetting Counterfeit and Substandard Medicines

May 12

B/N Seacole Mary

Mary Seacole – hero of the Crimean War

Without a doubt, Jamaica's most famous nurse is Mary Seacole.

Born Mary Grant in 1805 in Kingston, Mary Seacole was a heroine of the Crimean War. Her father was a Scottish military officer and her mother a black Jamaican. Her mother was also a healer and ran a boarding house for the recovering officers.

Mary was well educated and was a skilled nurse. When the Crimean War broke out, she traveled to London and applied to go to Crimea to tend to the wounded soldiers but she was not granted an interview by the British War Office. She then applied to Elizabeth Herbert, the wife of the secretary of state for war who was recruiting nurses for the war effort, but was again denied an interview and after some time received a letter of rejection. Britain, apparently, was not ready to welcome a black nurse.

Not one to give in easily, Mary travelled on



her own initiative and in 1856 established the British Hotel near Balaclava, using her own money in order to provide 'mess-table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers'. She spent many hours on the battlefield attending the wounded.

After the war, Mary Seacole was bankrupt, but her story was carried by the British press and money was raised by subscription to pay off her debts.

In 1857, she published *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*. The book was a great success and Mary Seacole became a popular figure. She spent the rest of her life travelling and working between London and Kingston. She was awarded the Crimean Medal, the French Legion of Honour and a Turkish medal. Mary Seacole died in 1881.

National Library of Jamaica