Putting patients at the heart of care delivery is key to nurse leadership

Present at the first successful heart and lung transplant at Papworth Hospital 25 years ago, modern matron Celia Hyde reflects on how her career has developed with the service

As modern matron working in Papworth Hospital’s transplant service, I believe that a passionate desire to do the best for patients is a far more important quality for practitioners who are new to the profession and who are keen to become nurse leaders than a high flying academic background.

Another essential ingredient for those with the post of modern matron in their sights – or any nursing role that requires leadership skills – is professional development. In order to obtain the development you need it is vital to have the support of your organisation.

Cardiothoracic transplantation is celebrating an important milestone this year. At Papworth Hospital 25 years ago, Professor John Wallwork carried out Europe’s first successful heart and lung transplant. I was fortunate to be a member of the nursing team in theatre that day, as an enrolled nurse who had been working at the hospital for just two years. Professional development opportunities have enabled me to develop as a practitioner as the transplant service has developed and grown.

In its early days the service had just two operating theatres and used temporary buildings for outpatients. Over the last quarter of a century it has grown and developed, and now uses five operating theatres, has a purpose built transplant outpatient department, a multidisciplinary team and a well deserved international reputation for the high quality of care it offers to the 65 new transplant recipients each year.

In terms of my own professional development, I had a clear desire to become a registered nurse, but the exams stood in my way. Not much of an obstacle, one might have thought, but a mountain to someone with dyslexia. However, my experience demonstrates that it is possible to progress up the career ladder with determination and support.

After nine years of working in theatre, I decided to try my exams again. The hospital’s education department supported me throughout the process and I was allowed to move from operating theatres to the transplant outpatient service, which enabled me to concentrate on my studies. All this support paid off and I sat and passed my finals in early 1994.

By the end of that year I had been promoted to senior staff nurse in the transplant outpatient department, where I still work today. With the hospital’s support, I went on to complete my diploma and then my degree. By August 2000, I was the sister in the transplant unit and just eight years later, I was appointed modern matron for the transplant service. My growth has been mirrored by that of Papworth Hospital and its transplant service. We now look after 815 post-transplant patients in our clinic, and I am pleased to say that I know them all by name and they know me. When I first joined the unit in 1991, the clinic list for the whole week was on one side of A4. Now the list is a full page each day. As with all growth and development, it is important to remain focused on the main objective and, in both my case and that of the transplant service, it was about maintaining and improving quality. For me, professional development is not about the next job title; it is about learning new skills to improve patient care.

Professional development is not about the next job title, it is about learning new skills to improve patient care.

CELLA HYDE is modern matron, Papworth Hospital transplant service, Cambridgeshire.