“It’s time to start generating good publicity about the NHS”

The adage that “today’s news is tomorrow’s fish and chip paper” is a lie. During my working life as a nurse and chaplain, I can remember a host of bad headlines in the national and local press about doctors, nurses, hospitals and the NHS. Mud sticks – but, worse than that, the relentless torrent of negativity grinds us down. It is both demotivating and demoralising.

We talk a lot about culture change in the NHS, and rightly so. But what we need far more is a culture change within our nation as a whole – we need to generate culture in which we don’t just look for the bad, but we also prize the good.

As a social experiment, I started a blog that tells the good news about the trust in which I work as a chaplain. I thought it would be a small venture with a couple of hundred views, but nothing has surprised me more. After eight months of blogging, I have nearly 200,000 views. This clearly shows there is an appetite to hear about the amazing stories that happen every day in our hospitals.

The stories featured on this blog are those such as that of my friend who had a detached retina fixed within a few hours, those from people who experienced kindness and compassion from a whole host of staff, and even stories from nurses who want to highlight a colleague’s demonstration of the 6Cs.

It’s easy to dismiss these stories to or consider them mundane – that is, until you realise that they make up a huge percentage of the experiences of the patients we serve, as well as those of their relatives.

And the work done, day in, day out, in our hospitals makes a huge difference to the quality of people’s lives.

In a recent survey conducted on the blog, more than 80% of employees said the stories had a positive impact on staff morale, while 60% of the public said the stories had given them more confidence in the hospital.

Good news breeds confidence as well as job satisfaction. Nobody comes into nursing to cause harm to people or to do a bad job. And it makes perfect sense that staff members who have a higher morale will do a better job.

Now, I am not saying that there is no need for a critique of the NHS nor that there is no need for continual improvements, but what we get in the press is no more than the same attack that is meted out to all institutions from the police to MPs to the church. And I’m all for a free press, but that’s not what we have at the moment. How can it be, when the thousands of daily, good-news stories have no platform?

Remember: change starts with small steps taken by individuals like you. So treat yourself and look for the good news and, better than that – believe it. I still have a vision that one day there will be a whole host of “good news” NHS blogs across hospital trusts nationwide. Perhaps you will be one of the people who starts one? Be the change you want to see, and don’t forget that you do one of the greatest jobs in the world.

David Southall is chaplaincy team leader at Worcestershire Acute Trust

Help those with aphasia regain control over life

The only insight most of us have into how it feels to be unable to communicate is to be on holiday in a foreign country and be unable to ask for what we need. For people with aphasia, this difficulty is an everyday reality.

To varying degrees those with aphasia have difficulty formulating sentences, remembering words, speaking, reading, writing and understanding what others are saying to them. This is a frustrating experience; it can make them feel robbed of life and their ability to take part in it.

Nurses need to use the depth of their skills and resources to ensure people with aphasia feel heard and have control over their lives. Our expert author on page 18 outlines the full impact aphasia has on patients’ lives and suggests strategies and approaches that can be used.

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