“Consider the excellence of daily care to be inspirational”

The recognition of nursing excellence boosts morale and inspires others. On the whole, the NHS is doing a good job – cancer survival has increased, the wait for elective surgery is falling and patient satisfaction is on the rise.

However, the health system is showing cracks, with demands arising from an increasingly ageing population, a greater prevalence of long-term conditions, the introduction of expensive new therapies and increasing expectations of nurses and patients. With this in mind, is it time for another change? Perhaps – but let us also pause and celebrate what we have.

Nursing is under intense pressure so it is time to think of more ways to recognise and celebrate the work achieved on the front line. We shouldn’t get bogged down by definitions of excellence; perhaps a recognition of the core nursing practices that integrate the 6Cs is what is needed. Evidenced-based practice and leadership are key factors in excellence – this is reflected in everyday nursing care. Yet how good are we at recognising each other’s excellence and acknowledging it?

There are opportunities every day in the NHS to motivate others by congratulating hardworking, dedicated nurse colleagues, who commit time to enhancing their knowledge and expertise. Some nurses are so accustomed to “surviving” a shift, that we fail to see some of the excellence being practised.

Time is a precious resource but rewards and recognition of good care can be shared informally over a cup of coffee or perhaps reflected at team meetings. These moments can build trust, reflect appreciation and promote kinship between peers. In sharing better care, nurses can help hospitals do less by perhaps reducing patient readmissions; more importantly, we can do more by adding value to each others’ roles and the care provided.

Celebrating each other on a more frequent basis can improve organisations as a whole. We can look for a variety of achievements in others such as transferable innovation, effective use of resources, striving to enhance practice through evidence and teaching, and care that reflects local needs.

Existing nursing practices need to be given a chance to evolve and be supported. Many excellent nurses are due to retire – their “kingmaking” skills should not be allowed to disappear with them.

Positive feedback may rank low in a nurse’s long list of clinical priorities and, in busy times, mutual pats on the backs may be so low on the list that they are never given. However, these micro-practices are the bread and butter of the NHS. We nurse because we care and we need to maintain a culture of trust and belief within our nursing community. There are genuine reasons for optimism within our generation of nurses, but we need security, we need positive feedback and we need the compassionate encouragement of others – at all grades. We all need to pause on the founding values of nursing, the excellence of everyday care, with the mission to maintain enthusiasm for nursing.

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