

Nursing Practice

COMMENT

“Bridging the age gap could help to solve the staffing crisis”

I was discussing nursing with a colleague last week and we shared stories of why we chose it as a career. I was surprised to learn that we had both been Brownies and Girl Guides and so were introduced to caring activities at an early age. For example, we visited care homes at Christmas to sing for older people and, for our childcare badges, we looked after children and babies.

Speaking to others I found that many of my colleagues had also been members of uniformed organisations when they were younger. It made me wonder whether the early introduction to caring planted the idea of nursing as a career option into young minds?

I reflected on this when I attended a careers fair last week in an attempt to inspire students studying healthcare courses to come into nursing in general, and nursing of older people in particular. Not one of the people I spoke to showed any interest in caring for older people. I was rather surprised, as my career choice had been an obvious and natural one for me.

I explained to the students I spoke to that the majority of patients are now aged over 65. We are becoming an ageing population so older people are found in many settings such as acute wards, intensive care and accident and emergency departments. However, the areas that appealed most to the students were midwifery, critical care and paramedic services.

So, what can we as a profession do to attract students and nurses to older people's care? Traditionally this is the backwater of nursing, a Cinderella service, the

place nurses used to be sent when they failed their finals, got married or became pregnant.

Friends of the Elderly, a charity that provides support to older people, has recently launched a Be a Friend campaign, which encourages people to reach out the hand of friendship to older people in their community. Today's society, with fragmented families living miles apart, has become a lonely place for older people. Many spend days alone.

Society needs to address these issues. Political, economic and social forces play their part in contributing to problems in society and, indeed, future problems in nursing. I predict that older people will pay the heaviest price as future nurses turn away from care of the older person.

The rising numbers of patients, coupled with the predicted global shortfall of nurses, is bringing us to a tipping point. We need to act fast.

We need to invest in the image of older people's care and show what a rewarding and fascinating specialty it is. We need to invest in people, provide structured career paths within the specialty and support those already working here. We need to find ways to engage young minds and show that older members of society are valuable and worthy of our attention. But most of all, for now at least, we need to cherish and value the older members of our society and give them the loving care they so very much deserve. **NT**

Liz Charalambous is staff nurse, Health Care of the Older Person, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham

HIGHLIGHTS

Improving health targets in diabetes p12

Managing diabetes in those with dementia p16

Raising concerns on student placements p20



SPOTLIGHT

All nurses must know how to manage T2DM

With type 2 diabetes affecting roughly one in 20 people in the UK, most nurses will regularly care for a patient with this condition. Often these patients are seen, or admitted to hospital, for another reason but their diagnosis of T2DM affects their care and recovery. A good knowledge of this increasingly prevalent condition is vital for nurses in all settings and specialties, so *Nursing Times* has developed an online learning unit on the prevention, diagnosis and management of T2DM to update and inform nurses (page 14).

The case-based scenario approach helps to translate theory into everyday practice. Nurses who successfully complete the online unit can print out a certificate confirming the learning objectives achieved, as well as the hours of CPD accrued to add to their revalidation portfolio.



Kathryn Godfrey is practice and learning editor of Nursing Times.

kathryn.godfrey@emap.com

Twitter @GodfreyKathryn. Don't miss the practice blog, go to nursingtimes.net/practiceblog