“HCAs are vital and deserve to be called nursing assistants”

Here in Northumbria we have launched our nursing strategy – a vision for compassionate frontline care – and within it have renamed healthcare assistants as nursing assistants.

Our strategy sets out a renewed focus on patients being at the heart of everything our nurses do, on high-quality care and on the support we offer to help our nurses develop. A key part of our vision is showcasing the different members in our nursing teams and how they work together to look after our patients.

To us, the term “nursing” matters a great deal and the new name of “nursing assistants” reflects the key role HCAs play delivering high-quality patient care. Given the way in which nursing has advanced over the last few years, the title “healthcare assistant” no longer does the role justice or recognises the caring relationship these staff members have with our patients.

Gone are the days when nursing assistants work on their own – today they are a major part of the nursing team, working alongside, and under the supervision of, the qualified nurses at all times.

The tasks they perform – whether that is washing or dressing, assisting with feeding, monitoring patients’ conditions or simply being there to talk to patients and offer them a listening ear – are absolutely vital. They account for a huge part of patients’ overall care and make such a difference to patients’ experiences.

Nursing assistants have the most direct contact with our patients – and often at a time when those patients feel at their most vulnerable. The assistants are there as a source of comfort, and provide emotional as well as physical support.

The roles nursing assistants perform are wide and varied and there is no area of our trust – be it in our hospitals or out in the community – where they are not involved with patient care. This could be an outpatient clinic, on a ward, in critical care or on a home visit.

The care they provide for patients in hospital with complex health needs and those who are managing long-term conditions in the community is hugely important and must not be underestimated. For many patients, nursing assistants provide real continuity of care.

In the community, nursing assistants visit people in their own homes independently, often being the only support those individuals receive at home. As a result, these staff members often develop an important bond with their patients.

The reaction we’ve received from our nursing assistants regarding the change of name has been overwhelmingly positive. They all know from the work they do on a day-to-day basis, along with the feedback they receive from patients, that they are key members of the nursing team. However, for their contribution to be publicly recognised by the trust means a great deal to them. It is particularly meaningful for the nursing assistants who have been with us for many years and is a mark of how their roles have changed.

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