“A patient’s perspective made me see nursing differently”

I am a senior nurse, currently off sick following several inpatient admissions for spinal surgery. I want to share some of my experiences with you in the hope that they will stimulate both celebration and reflection.

I recently spent two nights in a four-bedded bay on a ward while on bed rest. This enforced immobility meant I overheard things I would not be exposed to in a single room. On more than one occasion, as I lay in bed, I witnessed some excellent nursing care in action, which filled me with pride. Sadly, though, I also overheard difficult things that I was powerless to do anything about. I found it distressing wanting to intervene in others’ care but knowing I shouldn’t or couldn’t because I was there as a patient, not a nurse.

On the first night I was cared for by an excellent nurse. She had a calm and practical manner, and did small things that made me feel proud. I was aware that the ward was busy and staff were occupied with a particular patient. My fellow patients and I were waiting for medication and help to settle down to sleep, but we were pleased that the nurse made the time to come into our bay to calmly and briefly explain that they were busy. She then asked if anyone was in severe pain and needed their medicines urgently. Immediately we were on her side and happy to wait. This small act was reassuring to patients and demonstrated the importance of good communication.

On the second night I was woken by the lady in the bed next to me pressing her buzzer. There was a curtain between us so I do not know if it was a nurse or support worker who responded. The patient politely asked if anyone was going to bring her pain relief as she had been waiting since her admission to the ward, but she was told her nurse was on a break so she would have to wait. When the patient asked how long, she was told an hour.

I was very upset to hear this response and toyed with the idea of intervening, but decided not to and dropped off to sleep again. The next morning the close proximity of beds meant that, when the doctors came round, I clearly heard the same patient telling them that she had still not had any analgesia as there was a problem overnight. I was shocked, having assumed her medication had at least been given to her later on.

Adequate and timely pain relief is an essential aspect of care. If a healthcare support worker was involved rather than a registered nurse, it is vital that they know the importance of ensuring requests for pain relief are dealt with as quickly as possible.

As a nurse, being a patient is a useful way of seeing care from the patient’s perspective. But, fortunately, not all nurses will experience being a hospital patient. My experience as an inpatient reinforced two things for me. First, the importance, as referred to in the NMC code, of delivering care and treatment without undue delay. And, second, the power of reflection that can be made more powerful by putting yourself in the patient’s place. NT

Angela Houston is matron, Oxford Children’s Hospital

How nurses can reconnect with compassion

What makes a great nurse leader? We debated this last week at the ceremony celebrating our Nursing Times Leaders 2015. The 48 nurses and midwives on the list came from a diverse range of settings and roles, but had something in common – compassion was at the heart of what they did.

However, compassion can come at a cost, and in under-resourced organisations it can lead to stress. Many nurses protect themselves by disengaging their emotions, but as a result they lose compassion. Our innovation on page 21 reports on a leadership training programme that helps nurses increase emotional resilience so they can reconnect with their compassion and become champions of compassionate care. It may not be possible to impose cultural change to create compassion, but it is possible to inspire it if you have the right role models.

Ann Shuttleworth is practice and learning editor of Nursing Times.

www.nursingtimes.net / Vol 111 No 41 / Nursing Times 07.10.15