

# Nursing Practice

## COMMENT

### “Saddling people with loans will put off mature students”

In the November spending review, the government announced that, from September 2017, NHS bursaries for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals would be scrapped and replaced with loans. When I heard this, I was outraged at the impact this would have on patients, the workforce and the NHS as a whole.

Nursing is a particular area of concern. One of the reasons for this concern is that those doing nursing degrees are predominantly mature students. The average age of nursing degree students is 28, as many decide to come into nursing later in life. Many have done degrees before, have worked in other jobs and have responsibilities, such as mortgages and families. Mature students bring a wealth of invaluable life experience and a diversity that is vital to the nursing profession and patient care. What will happen to mature students when the NHS bursary is taken away?

The Independent Commission on Fees says that raising the cost of undergraduate tuition to £9,000 a year has led to a significant and sustained fall in mature students. Surely then, introducing a loan system for nursing, midwifery and other allied health professionals will have a negative impact on mature student numbers.

As a mature student, I would not have been able to complete my course without the NHS bursary. I started my mental health nurse training at the age of 22. I had just completed a psychology degree and taken a year out to work for a charity and travel. During my year out, I realised that mental health nursing was what I wanted to do. However, I was a mature student

with a debt already hanging over me from a previous degree. Was doing another degree even feasible?

One of the reasons I felt able to apply to study mental health nursing was because the course was funded by the NHS. It took a massive weight off my shoulders and I knew I would be able to focus on my degree and not worry about more debt mounting up. I wasn't eligible for a maintenance loan having already completed a degree, nor a living bursary having moved back in with my parents. I had to work hard to cover my living costs and, believe me, juggling placement, university and work was no easy feat. I can't imagine also juggling family life or a mortgage.

The diversity of nursing is what makes it so special. Mature students bring valuable life experience, knowledge and skills that we risk losing if mature students no longer feel able to join the nursing profession. For a mature student, deciding to go to university and train as a nurse is already a big decision – not only are you older, but you have other responsibilities to consider as well. Saddling people with loans is a step too far and will definitely put off mature students. The financial burden will simply be too much alongside all the other challenges.

The NHS bursary says “we care about you”, “we want to support you”, “we want to give you an opportunity”. Without it, I worry what's going to happen to the nursing profession. **NT**

*Sophia Koumi is vice-president education (health) at King's College London Students' Union*

## HIGHLIGHTS

Reflecting on informed consent *p16*

Developing a paediatric decision aid *p19*

Effectiveness of day hospitals *p23*



## SPOTLIGHT

### Weight loss in cancer patients causes distress

Weight loss is often associated with treatment and viewed as an inevitable consequence of the disease or its treatment. While many relatives and healthcare staff consider weight loss to be a normal part of the cancer journey, it can have a major effect on patients' psychological wellbeing.

The article on page 20 explores how weight loss affects people with cancer. The authors note that when weight loss becomes visible, patients, may become distressed.

The reasons for loss of appetite are complex and the article discusses one study that found that, while patients may have an appetite, this often disappeared when they were served food, particularly if in large portions. Nurses need to assess weight loss using a

holistic approach and listen to patients' concerns. This could help to not only improve nutritional intake, but also make eating a more pleasurable experience.



*Eileen Shepherd is clinical editor of Nursing Times.*

*eileen.shepherd@emap.com*

*Twitter @EileenShepherd. Don't miss the practice blog, go to [nursingtimes.net/practiceblog](http://nursingtimes.net/practiceblog)*