

GUEST EDITORIAL

The registered nurse/midwife as practitioner, partner and leader

In my short time at Morecambe Bay I have been impressed by the commitment and upcoming and untapped talent amongst our nursing and midwifery workforce. These staff make up about half of the workforce and occupy a unique role as the constant factor in the care and treatment of patients.

Nurses in particular have suffered locally and nationally from bad press these last few years. High profile investigations such as that conducted in Mid Staffordshire have altered public perceptions. Locally the North West Evening Mail has offered scathing but unsubstantiated criticism. The Trust's new policy for Nursing and Midwifery which was launched this July by Professor Dame Christine Beasley, Chief Nursing Officer for England, was developed after consultation with patients. Entitled 'Embracing the future and Building Confidence' it sets out a clear vision for the future of nursing and midwifery.

'Needs of patients at the heart of everything we do'

It is underpinned by six key themes which have been tested with patients, the public and staff. The themes are:

- Kindness and compassion
- Providing safe care in clean and comfortable environments
- Listening to patients and changing the way we work
- Producing confident, ambitious and inspirational leaders
- Working with partners for the benefit of patients
- Developing a questioning and analytical workforce

We will develop and involve our staff, work with others for the benefit of patients and make the best use of resources in what will be a challenging economic climate. The focus on quality, innovation, productivity and prevention (QIPP) presents exciting opportunities for nurses and midwives to make a contribution to the future so that our hospitals continue to be the first choice for patients.

Earlier this year we held a series of workshops with staff to understand 'what matters' to staff, patients and women. We examined the local headlines of today and in doing so considered how we were perceived by patients and the public as portrayed by our national and local media. We spent time together reflecting on how we as professionals have been perceived over the years.

The results of our discussions strongly influenced the way forward. We recognised how nurses had fallen from grace in the eyes of the public, how they were no longer seen as the guardian angel, and custodian of care, or even "doctors' handmaiden". Notwithstanding this the professions did have a strong and vivid brand that everyone understood, and something quite different from the old idea of the Matron who ruled the hospital with an iron discipline on £10 a year plus beer allowance and a £5 bonus for good behaviour!

In developing the Strategy we reflected on how some of the enduring qualities of nursing such as care and compassion

may have been lost as we have grappled with competing priorities, expanded our roles, taking on responsibilities traditionally undertaken by doctors, kept up with new technology and responded to reform which focused on access, productivity and finance. We considered how nurses have struggled to balance the humanity of caring with advanced technical skills and roles that they have integrated within the core of their roles and responsibilities.

Nurses and midwives are reminded of these values in their every day work; they will have a voice in the Trust with the confidence to stand up and be counted and to demonstrate their unique contribution as skilled practitioners in their own right and as equal partners in the leadership of clinical care and management of UHMB and within the wider healthcare community.

The key ingredients to the Strategy are:

- Developing highly skilled and versatile nurse and midwifery leaders with ambition and energy who
 - are confident to take risks within a framework of responsibility
 - go the extra mile and provide those 'magic moments' that patients never forget
 - regard 'special experiences' as the window of the soul of the organisation
 - are prepared to stand up and be counted
 - are politically astute and know how to influence
 - demonstrate and articulate the nursing and midwifery contribution by measuring the impact and value of what they do
- Getting the very fundamentals of care right in the first place

This edition of the Journal shows that the future is bright: in addition to those reported there are many examples of how nurses and midwives have led the way by being creative to drive services forward in search of excellent care.

I would urge nurses to follow the example of Carol Palmer and Sue Meyrick who should be commended for the way in which they are challenging traditional healthcare roles at the same time as enhancing patient care and experience.

Nurses and midwives face the challenge of re-affirming their roles in the future and portraying an inspirational image which is firmly rooted in the core values of the professions as well as establishing us as skilled practitioners and leaders and advocates of high quality care.

Our patients and communities will be the ultimate judges of our success and I look forward to reading the headlines of tomorrow.

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