WHISTLEBLOWING

Raising concerns: do the right thing

If you say nothing about poor care, you won’t rest easy. Get support and you’ll have the courage to speak up

By Mandy Day-Calder

I will never forget the clinical tutor who, after we had assisted an older woman to have a wash, asked me: ‘If this was your mum, would you do anything differently?’ This became my motto throughout my training and guided me in one of the most challenging situations I encountered: that of witnessing and reporting care that I felt verged on negligent.

Scared of any potential repercussions, I raised my concerns through the protection of my nursing school. However, I also made a vow to myself that I would always stand up for patients, colleagues and anyone else who I thought was being mistreated, including myself. It was difficult but I stuck to this promise, and it shaped me professionally and personally.

Throughout the country, wards are at breaking point. It is a sign of the times when even the most experienced and compassionate nurses may be tempted to turn a blind eye. So what can you do if you have concerns about the safety of those in your care or the way a colleague is being treated?

Let’s go back to basics – saying nothing may seem like the easiest route, but you won’t rest easy if you ignore your professional responsibilities to protect those in your care. The Nursing and Midwifery Council is clear about the nurse or midwife’s role in escalating concerns, outlined both in the Code and the regulator’s Raising Concerns guidance.

But how do you muster up the strength to do something constructive when you are already pushed to your limits?

Follow the process: regardless of the situation, there will be a clear process to follow. You will be expected to follow your trust’s policies, so don’t
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» take matters into your own hands. Gather the evidence and act accordingly.
» You are not alone: it’s natural to feel intimidated and emotionally drained when you raise a concern, so seek support. Confidentiality is paramount – use formal channels of support, such as your union, to talk over the incident, and focus informal support from family and friends on how you are feeling as opposed to the details of what has happened.
» Don’t be hard on yourself: it is always a good idea to examine your motives, because this can help you focus on what it is you are concerned about. However, try to avoid feeling guilty. Even if your concern involves a colleague, this is not a playground and you are not ‘telling tales’.
» Turn it around: thinking back to my student mantra, if it was your loved one who had been affected by poor care, would you want someone to stand up for them? The chances are you would.

Mandy Day-Calder is a freelance health journalist and life/health coach

I never expected to be offered a job on the spot

A mental health nurse’s visit to the RCN Bulletin Jobs Fair yielded a lot more than just leaflets and business cards

By Lynne Pearce

When Kellyann Anderton-Kay attended the RCN Bulletin jobs fair in Manchester in February, she got much more than she had anticipated.

‘I’d expected to come away with a few leaflets, business cards and some pens, but I ended up being offered a job,’ says Ms Anderton-Kay, who qualified as a mental health nurse in April.

‘I decided I wanted to be a nurse when I was eight,’ she says. ‘But I got married at 20 and had a family not long afterwards.’ After a spell working in retail, she became a cleaner at Royal Bolton Hospital in 2008, continuing to work while studying for her nursing degree, which she started in 2013 at Salford University.

‘We’ve always had mental health issues in the family,’ she says. ‘But I saw people getting help and getting better. The professionals engaged with my family members, taking the time to get to know them and what made them tick. They built a rapport, and I thought I’d like to do that. I wanted to pay back to the services that have helped us.’

Looking for her first nursing post using all the usual routes, she heard about the Manchester jobs fair on Twitter. ‘I went along with my