Are healthcare assistants doing ‘nursing on the cheap’?

JANE BATES

Where rationing leads, patient guilt will follow

It was the usual roll of medication; blood pressure pills, statins, painkillers, proton-pump inhibitors – all the tablets and capsules that keep the older generation going.

The patient, a sweet lady in her 80s, apologised for the length of the list. I reassured her that many people her age were taking a similar cocktail. ‘What worries me is that I’m getting all of these free when it’s the younger people we should be concerned about,’ she said. ‘We oldies are costing the NHS so much when resources are limited. Sometimes I feel guilty I’m still alive.’

Isn’t that sad? I reminded her of all the years she had contributed not only to the national purse, but to her family and community. There is a time to give and now was her time to receive. Cradle to the grave, and all that. By the time I had finished my homily, she and her relatives had almost dozed off.

This feeling of being washed up is not new; through the ages, older people have felt useless, overwhelmed by the pace of change. But older people deserve quality of life too, not to feel guilty for existing. If older people believe themselves not worthy of receiving medical care, others could also be of the same mind. With all the issues concerning rationing resources, we could be in dangerous territory indeed.

JANE BATES

HCAs are essential in delivering fundamental care to patients, and I do not think they are doing ‘nursing on the cheap’. They do have training, especially in caring for patients with dementia. If they do not feel competent to carry out some tasks, they must speak to senior staff. Roles and responsibilities need to be defined for all levels of staff to ensure the highest standard of patient care.

Jane Brown is quality governance manager, clinical support, at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

HCAs provide a large proportion of ‘hands-on’ care, and I do not want to undermine the great work they do. However, their role is to assist the nurse, with whom the ultimate responsibility for patients lies. Unison deputy head of health Sara Gorton says HCAs could earn more money stacking supermarket shelves. This may be so, but, like nurses, they are not in it for the money.

Grant Byrne (@GGByrne) is a nursing student in Scotland

While recognising the important contribution HCAs make to care, I wager that registered nurses provide excellent value for money, with ‘invisible’ preventative work saving a fortune. This is about accountability and competence – who will be held responsible if things go wrong? All staff should be trained to provide the care they are expected to deliver.

Liz Charalambous is a staff nurse, care of older people, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust @lizcharalambou

Grant Byrne (@GGByrne) says HCAs could earn more money stacking supermarket shelves. This may be so, but, like nurses, they are not in it for the money.

Daniel Athey (@danjathey) is a staff nurse on the acute medical unit at Northern General Hospital, Sheffield

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