Staffing issues keep me awake at night

As a child, professional nursing standards lead Mary Shimwell, looked forward to wearing the nurse’s uniform and ‘frilly hat’, but by the time she qualified the bonnets were long gone

By Sophie Blakemore

What makes a good nurse leader?
A good nurse leader should be credible, visible, approachable and accessible to staff.

How and where have you developed your leadership skills?
As a young person, I was in the Girl Guides and achieved my Queen’s Guide Award. I was head girl at my secondary school and loved all sports activities, except cross-country running.

I was also captain of some of the teams I played in. All of these gave me a good foundation to build on my leadership skills. I believe that you should treat people as you expect to be treated yourself. By being a fair but firm leader, and leading by example, you can gain respect from your colleagues, patients and relatives.

Why did you become a nurse?
My sister did her nurse training when I was very young, and I also had a Girl Guide leader who was a district nurse, which influenced my career decision.

In the late 1960s, I liked the uniform and the frilly hat, but by the time I was qualified, the frilly hats had gone.

I wanted to be a nurse because I wanted to care for people who were sick and dying, and thought it was a career that I would succeed in.

What has been your greatest challenge, and how have you overcome it?
Ensuring all bank staff have completed their mandatory training is my biggest challenge.

The additional staffing team has confirmed all bank staff now have access to their email and training management accounts which means we can audit exactly where we are up to with improvements.

Where would you like to be in five years’ time?
As I get older, the years seem to go quicker, so rather than thinking too far ahead I am happy doing what I am doing at the moment.

What, or who, inspires you, and why?
My mum was a great inspiration, instilling in me the values that she lived by herself.

Professionally speaking, what has given you most satisfaction?
I have been lucky over the years, working with individuals and teams who provide a great service to the community; most recently giving support to the newly set up hospital alcohol liaison service which has been a great success.

What keeps you awake at night?
Having nearly 900 bank staff. The main issues that keep me awake are being unable to cover all of the required shifts, despite the best efforts of the additional staffing team, and ensuring that everyone is up to date with their training requirements.

What is the best advice that you would give to a newly-registered nurse?
Know your limitations, have the courage to ask questions if you are unsure of what to do, never undertake a task or do anything that you cannot justify or give a rationale for, and care for every patient as you would care for your own family.

‘The main issues are not being able to cover all of the required shifts, despite the best efforts of the additional staffing team’

Mary Shimwell

What is likely to affect nurse leaders most over the next 12 months?
Staffing is the main issue that probably keeps a lot of senior nurses awake at night. At my trust, encouraging and supporting nurses and midwives with return to practice, international recruitment, and putting a more robust preceptorship package in place to attract new recruits, are all actions being undertaken.

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