Focus on patient dignity

For Kay Gibson, an Admiral nurse, working with a private care home operator means having more time to spend with patients

What does your job involve?
It is hands-on and strategic. I spend intensive time with five dementia care communities. This involves practical clinical supervision on the floor, reviewing dementia training and helping to develop the overall dementia strategy.

As well as supporting the residents, families and team members at our homes, I help the wider community too. If a family is struggling with decisions about a care home, or has concerns about an admissions process, I will meet them to help. It is essential to get dementia care right for each individual and family affected by it, and I focus on privacy and dignity.

Your previous role was as an in-reach specialist nurse at Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust. How did you work with care homes in this role?
It involved delivering a dedicated mental health service that empowered care home staff and avoided acute hospital admissions.

I carried out specialist mental health nursing assessments for older people at nursing homes, day centres and community hospitals. A large part of the role was to provide a consultative service on clinical issues relating to the needs of people with dementia, cognitive deficits, mental ill health and complex behaviour. I also promoted awareness of physical conditions that can lead to confusion in older people.

Why did you become an Admiral nurse?
I always wanted to work in dementia care. With Dementia UK, Admiral nursing offers a model, framework and professional identity for the dementia nurse specialist. It’s a relationship and family-centred role. You can learn from other Admiral nurses, and share best practice on how to support people with dementia and their families.

What might you have done otherwise?
Forensic nursing, because it is an area of mental health nursing that I find of great interest.

Most Admiral nurses work in the NHS in community settings. How will you find support from those in care homes?
Dementia UK is developing ways for Admiral nurses in care homes to keep up to date with evidence-based practice. This includes face-to-face and online learning opportunities. Dementia UK’s research and evaluation team also assesses the effect and benefits of the Admiral nurse role. This can inform quality improvements.

What are the differences between working in the NHS and for a private care provider?
People’s commitment to care is the same, but in a private care home you have the chance to spend a lot more quality time with a resident over a longer period. You can experience greater continuity of care in a care home than you would in an acute setting. There is more scope to put forward ideas and suggestions that can be put into practice.

What do you enjoy most about your work?
Meeting residents, families and staff. Being able to respond and getting involved.

What qualities do you think a good older people’s nurse has to have?
Compassion, understanding and adaptability in different situations.

Outside work, what do you enjoy?
Time with my husband and one-year-old daughter.

What achievement gives you most pride?
Playing a part in helping to bring Admiral nursing into the private sector. I am also proud of getting my degree, but becoming Colten Care’s first Admiral nurse has topped that.

What advice would you give to a newly-qualified older person’s nurse?
Be enthusiastic, committed and try to develop qualities of being adaptable and understanding. Remember that no two days are the same and you won’t get bored. There are challenges, but it is an extremely rewarding job. We need younger nurses who want to work with older people.

Admiral nurse services operate as a partnership between Dementia UK and a host organisation. Find out more at www.dementiauk.org