The ‘handmaid’s tale’ (Letters March 4) from a student who saw little benefit in an outpatient placement has sparked some vigorous responses.

Outpatient nurses are leading change

I was saddened by the experience of the student nurse during her placement in the outpatient department. This should have been a positive encounter with innovative and autonomous practice.

Outpatient nurses are at the forefront of change. Nurse-led clinics, such as dressing clinics for leg ulcers and aural toilet, anticoagulant therapy, pre-op assessment and asthma, have developed in recent years. We have implemented a telephone triage system, which gives patients direct contact with the named nurse managing the clinic he or she attends. This is used to provide information and advice on medication, investigations, worries and concerns or simply just to co-ordinate care.

These and other initiatives are happening nationally, not just within my trust. The strength of membership of the RCN outpatient nurses forum shows we are a powerful group working in a multidisciplinary team, hand in hand with doctors, to provide the best service for our patients.

Karen Coyle
Liverpool

Students can learn in outpatients

Part of my job involves working in a chronic pain outpatient clinic. These sessions have given me vast experience with different people.

I have become aware of the various treatments available for different conditions and find my opinion is sought during case conferences.

Yes I do keep records – an important part of any nursing career and I often make coffee for the consultant, but he also makes coffee for me.

Patients need nurses in out-patients as much as doctors. I suggest the student opens her eyes to the input she could make and the experience she could gain. She should read the article ‘Patients first’ by Claire Rayner in the same issue, where she says that nursing ability cannot be measured by examination-passing ability alone. Nursing is surely, she says ‘a craft as well as an academic exercise’.

Wendy Roche
Southport

I am much more than a handmaid

I am a healthcare assistant/phlebotomist in a busy outpatient department. Clinics start at 9.30am and many continue throughout the afternoon. Consultants and registrars come to these clinics directly from morning rounds. They work through, without stopping for lunch. I don’t find it demeaning to make them a coffee because I get coffee and lunch breaks. As for the form filling, while forms are being prepared the doctor is either waiting the patient’s notes or dictating a letter – not waiting for the ‘hand maiden’ to perform her duty. Cutting edge technology and nursing advancement have enabled more treatments to be done at outpatient level.

Liz Causey
Stanmore

Open your eyes to the opportunities

How long was the handmaid’s placement in outpatients? Our degree students spend eight days with us.

Our role may be that of hand maiden or secretary, but it is also carer, counsellor, co-ordinator and advocate.

Outpatients is the only department to have such a variety of specialties, so students, it’s up to you to gain as much from it as you can.

Jean Davis
Bournemouth

Is it time to strike for a better deal?

I read with incredulity ‘A return to a caring service’ by Geoffrey Rivett (Perspectives February 11). Mr Rivett believes that nurses are less caring now than in 1948, and that basic nursing ‘is often delivered by care assistants or by relatives after premature discharge’. Surely he recognises the adverse effects of many of the structural changes on nursing over the past 50 years. And premature discharges are conducted by doctors not nurses.

Mr Rivett thinks nurses in 1948 were poorly paid but highly valued. ‘These days, nurses are poorly paid and poorly valued.’ Let’s not rivet ourselves into an imagined golden age. It’s time to make our golden age now and for nurses to be willing to strike for a better deal.

Andrew Koh
London

Supernurse is not a bad role model

Dr Faugier, who says nurse Carol Hathaway from Channel 4’s medical drama ER, is a bad role model (News February 18) should have waited until the next series. Nurse Hathaway rejects medicine to set up a nurse-led ‘drop-in’ clinic. She’s not a bad role model, just someone with the doubts and frustrations we all experience.