Media re-enforces negative image of mental illness

Following on from Veronica Burton’s comments (Letters December 1), adverse reports in the media merely re-enforce the negative aspects of mental illness to the patient, their carers and the public. They also confirm the general belief that mental illness is inextricably linked with difficult, violent or objectionable behaviour. Until the public can be educated to realise that people who suffer a mental illness are vulnerable and in need of treatment, care, support and understanding, I fear the stigma will persist. I admire those who have suffered mental illness and have the courage to talk openly about it.

AP Cull
By e-mail

Students are not taught the importance of nutrition

I read the recent correspondence regarding poor feeding of older patients with interest (Letters January 12).

While I agree the shortage of nurses in some clinical areas is appalling, I would be reluctant to blame the failure to feed patients appropriately only on such simple explanations.

Failure to provide appropriate nutritional care to older people is not a recent phenomenon. The food is often unsuitable for older patients and is frequently left out of reach. Untouched plates are removed too quickly and patients in need of help are left unaided.

While such situations may reflect staff shortages to some extent, I fear that the problem goes much deeper. Few nursing students are taught the importance of nutrition, and food and feeding lie low on the list of nursing priorities.

Providing appropriate food and helping patients to eat does not require particular skill. If nurses feel strongly about this they can – and should – play a significant role in addressing many of the problems associated with this basic nursing task.

Susan Holmes
Professor of Nursing
Canterbury Christ Church University College

Support workers can be invaluable at meal times

I work on a very busy elderly mental health ward. We try our best to ensure that every patient has eaten, but a sad fact is that, unless they have dramatically lost weight, they can be overlooked.

That was until the ward got a generic support worker. She is not a nurse, but recognises when patients are unable to reach their food. And she is always willing to keep an eye on a particular patient as they eat their breakfast, or encourage another to try a biscuit as she hands out tea.

There are many places, particularly within the elderly care setting, where this valuable member of staff could be used to take some of the pressure off nurses who, through no fault of their own, miss out on noticing basic things.

Laura Adams
By e-mail

ENs running homes should not sell themselves short

I have had many replies to my request in the Network section of Nursing Standard for information from ENs working in private nursing homes.

One thing that I have noted from the response is that ENs figure very highly in running private homes and a large percentage of them are underpaid and undervalued.

And it seems the rates of pay and levels of responsibility vary greatly from home to home. Wages range from £5.20 to a respectable £9.00 per hour for taking charge of shifts.

My advice to all ENs is to look at the role you perform and assess your importance to the running of the home. Look at the options management have open to them. Can they attract RGNs? Can they find a replacement for you?

If you believe that you are worth more than you are getting, negotiate a better deal. Ask for more money, a pension scheme or health scheme, or ask for more holidays. If management refuse to negotiate, or try to fob you off with tales of poverty, shop around. Most of all, never sell yourself or your qualification short.

J Weldrick
East Yorkshire

Some things never change

I thought this cartoon would be very appropriate for Nursing Standard’s Making Time campaign. It’s a pity it seems that nothing changes – it was first published in the Sunday Express on April 27 1969!

Mike Travis
Liverpool

Professionalism kept us going over new year

I read with interest the health secretary’s praise for all nurses and healthcare staff who worked over the millennium. But I would like to point out that we had no choice but to deliver good care in one of the busiest periods endured by the NHS.

It is nurses’ professionalism and pride that kept their morale high enough to deliver a good service, despite being understaffed and under stress financially.

Leslie Aldridge
Portsmouth

J Weldrick
East Yorkshire

Some things never change

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