Looking for the perfect patient

All through my training it was reinforced constantly that there was no such thing as a 'difficult patient'. Unfortunately, the reality is different. Some patients are labelled as 'strange', some 'impossible to please' and some are classed as 'over-demanding'.

Take a wild animal from its natural environment and it will act out of character. It becomes unsure of itself and afraid. We have all experienced fear and know it can affect us in different ways. There are those of us who become defensive, there are those who become demanding and there are those who blame others for their misfortunes and seek faults.

The Patient's Charter, among other things, has made the public more aware of their rights and the service they should receive. Like our American cousins, we are coming to expect more. Everyone, including myself, my colleagues, my seniors and most importantly my patients, expects a high standard of service from me. And when I am the user or purchaser of a service, whether I am out for a meal or buying something, I expect a high level of service.

Nursing is by its nature full of different personalities. However, we are all individuals with different life experiences giving us different opinions, thoughts, beliefs and morals which cannot be switched off, and which affect our interaction with others.

We all have our favourite patients, with whom we probably share some common interest or belief. People will normally gravitate to those who agree with them. This is simple human nature. But those patients we do not get on as well with still have the right to receive treatment and care to the best of our ability. I guess it is important to remember that we are being paid to do a job or to provide a service, and we cannot stand in judgement no matter what our personal standards might be. Whatever reason we have for not getting along with a patient, it is never as simple as we just do not like them. They are getting treatment for a reason and are likely to be afraid. And while we are not there as verbal punch bags, there will always be people who are short, snappy or even aggressive towards us.

I believe the concept of 'the difficult patient' is an area that warrants discussion and further study. But in the meantime we should perhaps remember that often people just see the uniform, and we should try hard not to take it personally.

There's nowt so queer as folk – as the saying goes. And if we expect all our clients to be model patients, we're in for a big surprise, says Craig Graham.

Craig Graham is a staff nurse at Law Hospital, Carluke

standard life

Research suggests professional intuition is best - now is that evidence based?

Daniel Allen, RMN, is a freelance journalist