Ask and you might receive

Being classed as disabled is not all bad news: there’s assistance and perks for those who ask, says Fo Ettinger

I would not like to give the impression that I enjoyed becoming disabled, but it definitely has its perks. I certainly don’t think of myself in this category, but officially I am.

When I could no longer work and needed two crutches to get around, a friend suggested I apply for disability living allowance (DLA) and, to my surprise, after a certain amount of form-filling, the princely sum of £90 started to turn up in my bank balance every week.

Just over half of that is my mobility allowance with which I can finance a car of my choice, have a Motability car and only pay for the petrol, or buy a ‘buggy’ and whizz around the streets like Boadicea, minus the wheel blades.

The remainder is to pay for help in the home if desired, or take-away curries (to save on the cooking, of course). When my husband was made redundant, the Job Centre told him he might be eligible for a carer’s allowance, and indeed £50 a week now arrives in his account.

Neither of us had known about these very welcome benefits, so ask yourself if any of your patients or relatives might be eligible for these or other services. The other extremely useful thing I became entitled to was the ‘orange badge’ for car parking. I believe the rules in England are different from those here in Scotland, and English badge holders are time limited.

Locally I am allowed to park on single or double yellow lines, but curiously not in loading bays. I am filled with righteous indignation when able-bodied drivers park in the disabled bays at supermarkets, although we walk much further round the shop itself than from the car to the entrance.

My badge served me best when I went with six others in one vehicle, one rainy November night, to hear a friend sing in a choir at the Albert Hall. It cost me only two phone calls to arrive at the front entrance, have the barrier lifted and park right next to the front door. Now that’s what I call a perk.

Fo Ettinger is a qualified nurse in Ross-Shire

Do you wanna be on TV?

An election campaign is the perfect time to use the media to your advantage, as Anne Roberts explains

Local newspapers, radio and TV are always on the lookout for stories, especially during an election campaign. So if you are taking part in the campaign by meeting candidates or arranging workplace visits, make sure everyone knows about it.

The best way to do this is to contact the media – local papers, radio or TV.

The key to working with the media is to keep it simple. If you make sure you include the five Ws – Who was there, What went on, When, Where and Why – you generally can’t go wrong.

Here are some ideas. Letters in newspapers are read by scores of people. Keep your letter short (that maximises the chances of publication) and try to cover one or two key points. Specify which area of nursing you work in if that helps the point you are making.

If you phone in to a radio programme spend a bit of time beforehand thinking about what you want to say, and don’t be tempted to make too many points.

Stick to one or two main issues and be sure to mention that you are a nurse – it will add credibility to what you are saying. The same applies to being in a TV studio audience – do some preparation, give yourself some thinking time and have fun.