That ‘someone’ should be every nurse. When we see these stories or television programmes we should write to the press and contact the programme makers and show them that their shocking programmes and articles do not reflect what the majority of nurses do every day.

How many stories tell you about the unpaid overtime worked by nurses and the amount of study completed in their own time? How many nurses buy their own equipment because their employers buy sub-standard alternatives? The list is endless. We do not have to employ spin doctors. Any nurse will be more than happy to tell you what is wrong with their service, but we must also highlight the positive.

We may yet live to see a positive news programme or newspaper headline, but while we are waiting let’s not get downhearted by all the negative messages. The majority of popular media is fiction and, if nothing else, nurses have always lived in the real world NS

See letters pages 38-39

Nurse Margaret Haywood’s undercover filming exposed ill-treatment of older patients on an acute medical ward

To ensure public confidence is to speak up whenever you see unacceptable practice. Tell someone. Go through the proper channels and get the situation rectified. If it does not change then shout about it from the rooftops. Nurses have a duty to patients, the public, their profession and themselves as individuals not to allow the neglect of patients to occur.

Mike Lehane, a community psychiatric nurse in Cardiff, writes:
The Panorama programme again highlighted bad practice in our nursing care. Add the antics of the Big Brother nurse and the fact that more teenagers are aware of Abi Titmuss than Florence Nightingale, and the overall view of the profession in the public eye has never been lower.

But who do we turn to when we need to raise the profile of nurses? This, to me, is where the real problem lies. As a profession we feel wronged by the behaviour of nurses who allow their standards to slip and do not provide the best care possible. But we always expect someone else to speak for us.

That ‘someone’ should be every nurse. When we see these stories or television programmes we should write to the press and contact the programme makers and show them that their shocking programmes and articles do not reflect what the majority of nurses do every day.

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NURSING STANDARD

NURSE MARGARET HAYWOOD’S UNCOVERED FILMING EXPOSED ILL-TREATMENT OF OLDER PATIENTS ON AN ACUTE MEDICAL WARD

SPEAK UP WHEN YOU SEE UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICE. GET THE SITUATION RECTIFIED

Nurture older people and help them bloom

Photographs can remind us that every older patient is an individual, writes Colin Parish

The Panorama programme caused a lot of anger and soul-searching. Anger because nurses believe that the majority of their colleagues are caring people. And soul-searching because we have no proof that these scenes of neglect are unique.

One of the most effective parts of the programme was using pictures of patients in their prime. Suddenly these were not ‘generic older people’. Here was a woman who speaks three languages, and here a young family growing up after the war. Here was a nurse. Real people with real lives.

Watching the programme, I remembered hearing about a different approach to care. Instead of the success of a shift defined by handing over the same number of patients alive that you started with, they should be nurtured like tender plants. Fed and watered, and admired by everyone who catches a glimpse of smiling, happy faces.

Gardeners need encouragement to carry on the backbreaking work of looking after a young plant and do it by making sure their plants are labelled with a beautiful picture of the blooms to come. So why shouldn’t nurses do the same?

Every older person who goes into hospital should take a large photograph of themselves as a vigorous young person, doing the kind of things the nurses do after their shifts. It would remind nurses that these people are individuals, just like themselves and that the frail older person they see before them is as unique and valuable as any other patient NS

Colin Parish is a Nursing Standard news reporter

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