necessary, swiftly acted on through unannounced inspection.

Yet this government’s declared aim is to reduce inspections and rely more on self-regulation. If this is achieved, we shall have more older people dying of neglect and more mentally ill patients being abused.

Joyce Robins, co-director, Patient Concern

STUDENT WORK PLACEMENTS IN OUTPATIENTS CAN BE REWARDING

I am writing in response to the student who had a disappointing placement in an outpatients department, and who observed little nursing throughout the experience (reflections May 25).

There are outpatients departments where the nurse’s role is central to the patient’s experience and where nurses, new and long-serving alike, work within the multidisciplinary team to provide excellent care.

I work in a busy trauma and orthopaedic outpatients department where nursing students are welcomed and supported. We take students on one-week placements and provide them with a handbook and information on the learning opportunities we can provide.

The feedback we have had from students has been consistently high and we shall soon be accepting third-year management students.

I sincerely hope that incidents such as those described in the article are isolated and that most nursing students are able to appreciate the important work carried out in outpatients departments.

Marion Williams, by email

PRIVATISATION HAS FAILED TO IMPROVE CARE OF OLDER PEOPLE

Legislation in 1990 allowed local authorities to farm out the care of older people to private sector providers. The problems at the UK’s largest care home firm Southern Cross (news June 8) demonstrate the perils of pursuing such a policy and proves the government is wrong in arguing that services can be improved by privatising them.

Mike Travis, Liverpool

RCN WILL PUBLISH GUIDANCE ON MOBILE PHONE USE AT WORK

Robert Munro describes the confusion surrounding nurses’ use of mobile phones at work (features June 1).

The RCN’s advice is that regular use of personal mobile phones for work-related purposes is not advised. They should never be used to record, transmit or store patient’s personal or health information or images.

We will shortly be publishing a position paper on the issue which will advise staff to adhere to their employer’s policy on mobile phone use. The college will suggest that work contact details should be used at all times and nurses should not give their mobile phone numbers to patients.

Lone workers assessed to be at risk of verbal or physical abuse should be issued with appropriate technology.

Nursing staff should not have to bear the brunt of costs associated with regular work-related mobile phone use. Instead the local policy on claiming for work-related calls should be followed.

Standard infection control precautions, such as handwashing and appropriate use of disinfectant wipes, should be used at all times when staff are using equipment.

Up-to-date antivirus software should be installed and staff should be advised not to open documents, texts and emails from unknown sources or to transfer materials that are known to be infected to work computers.

Alison Wallis, RCN eHealth adviser

CALLING ALL MENTAL HEALTH NURSES WORKING IN GP CLINICS

I work in GP surgeries as a mental health practitioner. We are trying to set up a pilot of independent prescribing in our clinics.

We would like to contact any mental health nurses who already do this as it would be useful to see how they run and what support the nurses receive from the GPs. Please email Lynn.Miller@rdash.nhs.uk

Lynn Miller, Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust

Obituary

Jennifer Worth
1935-2011
Nurse and bestselling author

Jennifer Worth, author of the bestselling Call The Midwife trilogy, has died at the age of 75.

Born in Clacton-on-Sea in 1935, she grew up in the Buckinghamshire town of Amersham. After training to be a nurse at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, Jennifer travelled to London to study midwifery. She worked as a nurse, midwife, ward sister and night sister in the capital from 1953 until 1979, when she left nursing to pursue her passion for music. She taught piano and singing for the next 25 years and sung in choirs all over Europe.

Jennifer’s first book, Eczema and Food Allergy, was published in 2007. She had developed eczema at the age of 57 and used to lie awake at night, scratching and crying. In the book, she details how she came to identify the cause of her condition.

Jennifer then turned to writing novels, spurred by the belief that midwives should appear more often as characters in fictional literature. Call The Midwife, published in 2008 and the first book in the trilogy, was based on her experiences of being a nurse in the east end of London in the 1950s. Shadows of the Workhouse was next, followed by Farewell to the East End.

Her last book, In The Midst of Life, stresses the need for peace in the hour of death. ‘I was privileged to be one of the generation of nurses who were required to sit with the dying,’ she said.

Jennifer enjoyed playing her 1904 Bluthner piano every day. Another of her passions was long distance cycling on her made-to-measure bicycle.

Call The Midwife is currently being made into a television series.

Laurence Dopson is a freelance journalist

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