William’s parents, whose generosity has made this series possible.

Anne Carter, head of appeals and publicity, Tuberous Sclerosis Association, Birmingham

SAFEGUARDS SHOULD BE FOCUS OF ASSISTED SUICIDE DEBATE
Further to the recent correspondence on assisted suicide (letters June 8 and 15), there is a paucity of evidence to support either side of the argument.

There is some up-to-date information from Clive Scale, notably his article ‘End-of-life decisions in the UK involving medical practitioners’ (Palliative Medicine, 2009, 23, 3, 198-204) and reports about the working of physician-assisted legislation in the United States (www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas).

However, it is surely more appropriate to consider what safeguards would be required to protect against a slippery slope should assisted suicide be legalised in the UK.

Evidence from overseas jurisdictions suggests that more rigorous safety standards are required than those put forward to date by campaigners for a change in the law here.

I suggest the prime purpose of the law is to protect society overall rather than indulge the choice agenda of a few.

Celia Manson, by email

OFFERING DIALYSIS AT HOME IS A LONG-ESTABLISHED PRACTICE
Your news story on a scheme allowing patients to receive dialysis at home (June 8) suggests that home dialysis is new, but this is not the case.

A paper by BHB Robinson published in 1977 (Living with renal failure, multidisciplinary symposium, University of Stirling) showed that 58.8 per cent of patients in the UK receiving treatment for chronic renal failure in 1972 were on home dialysis and that this had risen to 65.8 per cent by 1975.

The benefits of home dialysis, including reduced cost and improved quality of life, have been known and commented on for many years.

Indeed, home dialysis was so well recognised by the Department of Health that it made provision in the mid-1960s for the post of home dialysis administrator to be included in the Whitley Council Regulations.

Graham Harston, by email

WONDERFUL STORIES ABOUT NURSING ARE A FITTING LEGACY
I was sad to read that Jennifer Worth has died (obituary June 15), but her books will live on. Her Call the Midwife books are my favourite read. Through her storytelling, Jennifer really did nursing justice.

Nursing students at the University of York are writing stories based on the memories of their patients (news June 15). It is part of a project to improve their understanding of older people’s care needs.

This initiative should be extended to all nurses and students. I can imagine some wonderful stories of the experiences of older people through storytelling.

Karen Bartlett, by email

NURSE, AUTHOR AND MUSICIAN ACHIEVED SO MUCH IN HER LIFE
Thank you for the excellent obituary of Jennifer Worth (June 15), the best-selling author of the Call the Midwife trilogy, who died on May 31 at the age of 75.

Jennifer certainly packed a lot into her life. She was a nurse and midwife for 20 years before pursing her music studies and teaching piano and singing.

I met Jennifer a couple of times at her Hertfordshire home, surrounded by her music and piano, her husband’s paintings and photographs of her family. She was very welcoming.

Jennifer had tremendous enthusiasm and energy for everything she did. We had a great time comparing notes about our experiences of nursing and the patients we cared for.

She had great empathy and was a wonderful observer and good listener. I could understand how she got on so well with her patients.

Suzanne Groom, Rugby

Obituary

Joan Wheeler
1926-2011
Nurse, midwife, tutor and nurse education adviser

Joan Wheeler was closely involved in drafting the act establishing the UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in 1979. She was often at hand in a box behind the Speaker’s chair to advise ministers guiding the legislation through the Commons. Joan was awarded an OBE for this work.

Born in Oswestry, Shropshire, Joan began her nurse training at the Royal Shrewsbury Infirmary, Shrewsbury, at the age of 17. She moved to London for midwifery training at a Queen’s Institute unit at Paddington, and the Mothers and Babies Hospital, Woolwich.

Returning to the Shrewsbury Infirmary as a sister, Joan taught as an unqualified tutor. She then went to Canada for two years, working at a women’s hospital in Toronto.

In 1955 she took a nurse tutor’s diploma at Battersea Polytechnic in London, describing this as a life-changing experience. Joan then discovered her academic potential and this gave her the confidence to further her career.

From being a tutor in Shrewsbury and Westminster Hospital, she became a regional nurse officer for the south east metropolitan region. Joan was appointed to a senior nurse officer position at the Department of Health and led a team at the Department of Education overseeing nurse training. Joan developed type 2 diabetes in her fifties and was a campaigner for diabetes research and education.

She campaigned for the Social Democratic Party and the SDP-Liberal Alliance. In retirement, Joan moved with four nursing friends to Devon, joining St Margaret’s Church, Topsham, and the Women’s Institute.

Laurence Dopson is a freelance journalist

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