The profession has plenty to be proud of

There have been more lowlights than highlights for nurses in 2011, as the reality of getting by professionally and personally on meagre resources has started to hit home. Everyone knew we were in for tough times, but this tough? And the ‘age of austerity’ has barely started.

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To make matters worse, stories of poor care in the national media have outweighed those highlighting excellence, and the profession’s reputation has been damaged as a consequence. Nursing posts have been cut (largely by stealth), pay rates put in the deep freeze and pension prospects seem to become gloomier by the day.

But there are grounds for optimism as we head towards the new year, and a plethora of reasons why nurses should continue to be proud of their profession in the face of adversity. The Care campaign being run by Nursing Standard and the Patients Association is one such example, as nurses throughout the UK voice their support and demonstrate their determination to do best by their patients.

Last week we wrote to the chief executive, chair and nurse director of every NHS trust in England to seek their support. Among those already signed up was Frimley Park, a foundation trust in Surrey that featured in a recent compendium of case studies about poor care compiled by the Patients Association. Rather than issuing a mealy mouthed apology, the trust acknowledged it had let down a patient and responded by committing itself to ensuring everyone in its care receives a high quality service.

The judges in Nursing Standard’s annual nurse of the year awards meet next month to decide which of the entrants deserves to win each of the categories. Once again the standard is extremely high. At the same time, members of the public have been nominating nurses who have delivered outstanding care for the Clare Rayner Patients Choice Award. No doubt more will follow before the deadline for entries passes on December 16.

Being a nurse is rarely easy, and the challenges facing the profession over the next 12 months will present a severe test of its resilience. But it is worth remembering that patient satisfaction rates are high, and that the public retains more trust in nurses than any other profession. Nurses may be being undervalued by the government, but they continue to be held in high esteem by the people who really matter.

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For details on the Clare Rayner Patients Choice Award go to page 59