and biological sciences and head of the school of nursing and midwifery at the University of Southampton.

She has played a key role in raising awareness of the importance of communication skills, health promotion in nursing and evidence-based practice. She is a powerful advocate of robust education pathways and advanced nursing roles.

Laurence Dopson is a freelance journalist

TICKED OFF WITH AUDITING AND MEASURING INSTEAD OF CARING

I have to agree with Julie Hall (letters December 14) that it seems wrong to deliver care by rote rather than by conscience and humanity.

I am also sad that in the 13 years I have been nursing it has become more about the science of audit and ticking boxes than the art of providing good care and attending to our patients.

The advent of care pathways has encouraged the promotion of ticking off activities and measurements. Well, I am getting ticked off with it all.

Perhaps we should start to put crosses through much of it and just get on with caring for our patients.

Michelle Biggins, by email

RELIGION HAS NO PLACE IN AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROFESSION

I have no problem with clerics or chaplains visiting the faithful in hospital and offering support (careers November 30). But the taxpayer should not be funding hospital chaplaincy services or encouraging work placements for nurses in chaplaincies.

Nursing should be evidence based. It would be wrong to encourage students or nurses to spend time in a department that is faith based.

The role of hospital chaplains as counsellor, supporting staff members’ psychosocial needs, is problematic. Their counsel cannot be seen as unbiased; it is always going to include the moral slant and dogma of a particular faith. Worse, it may be seen as recruiting or ‘spreading the word’.

We live in a secular country and should be steering science away from religion at every opportunity.

Jon Young, by email

USE FAT TAX PROCEEDS TO CUT COST OF HEALTHY FOODS FOR POOREST

I read the debate on introducing a ‘fat tax’ on foods with great interest (reflections December 14). If the government were to introduce a tax on foods such as crisps and ready meals, the cost of full-fat dairy produce would also rise sharply.

A fat tax may deter people from buying fatty products and encourage them to eat more healthily. But the poorest sections of society tend to have the worse diets, as this is all they are able to afford. Increasing the cost of food is always going to hit them hardest.

Proceeds from a fat tax could be used to provide a voucher system for fresh fruit and vegetables, or be used to cut the cost of healthier foods.

Dan Taylor, by email

TARGETS ARE DRIVING US AWAY FROM THE PATIENT’S BEDSIDE

Commenting on the introduction of two-hourly rounds at a London hospital, Julie Hall (letters December 14) says that caring for patients is more than just a tick-box exercise.

But in today’s target-driven NHS, with its emphasis on quality indicators and outcomes, we have to provide documented evidence of all provision.

Care plans and reams of written records are overwhelming staff. This can lead to less time providing direct patient care. Many nurses are buckling under the strain of record-keeping and their frustration is evident.

Something needs to change and all available options should be explored. We must continue to give our patients the best possible care, with time to spend with them at the bedside, while managing to keep good records. Delivering care to patients should not be jeopardised by vast amounts of paperwork.

Nancy Bell, by email

Helen Heath, who has died aged 67 from a cerebral haemorrhage, was a pivotal figure in nursing research.

She taught at Homerton College Cambridge school of health studies, now part of Anglia Ruskin University, and was an expert on grounded theory.

Mainly used in qualitative research, grounded theory is a systematic methodology involving the generation of theory from data. Dr Heath's advice to nurse researchers was always: 'The aim is not to discover the theory, but a theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation.'

She authored a classic paper with her supervisor Sarah Cowley, professor of health policy management at King’s College London. Published in the International Journal of Nursing Studies in 2004, ‘Developing a grounded theory approach: a comparison of Glaser and Strauss’ has, according to Google scholar, had a remarkable 126 citations.

Dr Heath was awarded her doctorate in 2005 for her thesis on a grounded theory study of transition to the role of staff nurse.

She was at the forefront of intensive care nursing of children and babies. At 24, she was sister in the intensive care unit at Birmingham Children’s Hospital, later moving to St James’s Hospital in Leeds as sister of the children’s heart unit.

As her interest in research grew she lectured in Australia and Canada, and presented at international conferences. She was a nurse tutor in Cambridge and Peterborough, and taught until her retirement in 2009.

She also studied with the University of the Third Age, enjoyed the ballet and theatre, and was a much loved sister, aunt and great-aunt.

Laurence Dopson is a freelance journalist