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.
Karen Sanders, 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,
without 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

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
got 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 chaplain 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

Obituary

Helen Heath
1944-2011

Researcher and expert
on grounded theory

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