HIV/AIDS and the burden on healthcare services can be reduced if all nurses in whatever field consider opportunistic HIV testing for patients.

The more testing that can be offered in supportive healthcare settings, the less likely it is that people will feel the need to pay for over-the-counter tests.

Sam Mabey Putofft, by email

CLARIFICATION ON ISSUE OF BARRING NHS STAFF FROM AGENCY WORK

With reference to the letter ‘Barring NHS staff from agency work is anti-competitive’ (June 27), the legal situation is simple. Each trust determines its own approach to engaging temporary staffing agencies.

NHS Professionals works with its clients to manage the bank of flexible workers, but does not advise its clients on permanent staff policy.

Flexible workers registered with NHS Professionals are free to work wherever they wish when not on shifts with NHS Professionals, provided it does not negatively affect their ability to work in the NHS and they operate safely within working time regulations.

Most NHS trusts prevent nurses on permanent contracts from working as agency nurses at their trust. These measures tend to reduce the amount of NHS money spent on agency staff and increase the proportion of temporary shifts that are filled by bank nurses.

Keith Nash, human resources director, NHS Professionals

BLINKERED ASSUMPTIONS IMPLY THAT I DO NOT BELONG IN NURSING

Starjeena D’Costa writes that barring nurses employed on NHS contracts from agency work is anti-competitive and potentially in breach of sex discrimination legislation (June 27). She writes: ‘Would hospital trusts want to prevent tradesmen from doing paid work at the weekends or doctors working for an agency?’

As a male third-year nursing student, I am appalled by the blinkered assumptions that all nurses are female, and doctors and tradespeople are male. In choosing to be a nurse, I have had a hard enough time dealing with people outside nursing making assumptions about my abilities and my sexuality.

It is disappointing that some people in my profession continue to make sweeping generalisations that imply I do not belong in their world.

David Scott, by email

EAT PROPERLY, KEEP FIT, WORK ON YOUR POSTURE AND LEAD BY EXAMPLE

I agree heartily with nurse and life coach Lynne Healy that we have a duty of care to ourselves (reflections June 27).

We should not get into the habit of doing a full shift without a proper break. My fit, athletic nephew worked on a ward where the culture was ‘you work until you drop’. He has now moved to more rewarding work where there is a different culture of care.

We also need to heed our display screen equipment training and not get too busy or lazy to think about our posture. As the training states: ‘A laptop computer should not be used on a lap.’ I cringe every time I look at the poor little blue creature you use as the logo for the practice profile page.

As nurses, we need to lead by example. Eat properly and keep fit.

Caroline Wallis, by email

LAURENCE DOPSON WAS A GREAT CHRONICLER OF NURSING LIVES

I was very sorry to read about the death of freelance journalist Laurence Dopson, who was a regular and much-valued contributor to Nursing Standard (analysis June 27).

As regional director of RCN London, I had the good fortune to speak to Laurence on three or four occasions after the deaths of prominent London members. He captured very well in his obituaries the lives, work and personalities of many nursing pioneers.

I will keep him and his family in my thoughts and prayers.

Bernell Bussee, by email

Obituary

Laurence Dopson
1924-2012
Veteran nursing and medical journalist

Laurence Dopson, who has died aged 88, enjoyed a career in journalism spanning more than 65 years. He witnessed the end of the Poor Law era in 1948, and was writing about the contemporary NHS until shortly before his last illness.

His original career aim was to be a doctor, but he had to leave the University of Edinburgh for health reasons. Medicine’s loss was nursing’s gain when the chance discovery of a vacancy as a reporter with Nursing Times led to freelance work, followed by a permanent position.

He was proud to be the first man to be a member of the editorial staff of a nursing journal in the UK. No two days were ever the same and he learned to ‘always wear your smartest suit, because you never know when you will be sent on a royal visit’.

Equally at home interviewing ward nurses or the ‘great and good’, he managed to coax notable insights from former prime minister Harold Macmillan and Dame Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement.

His probing interview style reflected a passion for accuracy and attention to detail, but he always tried to see the best in nursing. A lifelong commitment to the profession led to many enduring friendships, and he was elected as the first honorary member of the Association of Hospital and Residential Care Officers (AHRCO). He leaves a close friend, Stella Shorthouse, whom he met at an AHRCO conference.

Laurence believed that a knowledge of history could provide a sense of perspective in the fast-paced world of health care. Writing nursing obituaries for publications such as Nursing Standard and The Independent provided an ideal outlet for his talents. He will be greatly missed.

John Adams is a lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University