Nurses could be struck off by NMC for failing to show compassion

Exclusive by Christian Duffin

The nurses’ code of conduct could be amended to make ‘compassion’ a professional requirement.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is expected to consider the change this autumn as part of a wholesale review of the professional code, NMC council member and former chair Judith Ellis said.

Such an amendment would pave the way for nurses to be disciplined formally for the first time if they failed to show compassion towards patients.

This reassessment of the code of conduct comes after the Francis report pointed to a need to identify and develop nurses’ compassion. In his report into poor care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, Robert Francis QC called for greater emphasis on compassion in recruitment and education. He said would-be nurses should undergo testing to ascertain their ability to demonstrate compassion.

England’s chief nursing officer Jane Cummings backs the move. She told Nursing Standard: ‘The NMC is a key partner in delivering our compassion in practice strategy, and it is appropriate that compassion is reflected in the NMC code of conduct.’

During a conference of senior NHS managers in London, an audience member asked Professor Ellis whether the word ‘compassion’ would be introduced to the code. She replied: ‘I cannot guarantee it, but it is likely.’

RCN general secretary Peter Carter told the conference that most nurses care deeply for their patients, but poor work environments can in result in staff lacking compassion.

Nurturing staff
Retired nurse and peer Baroness Emerton told Nursing Standard: ‘You would hope that all nurses have compassion, but it can be difficult if patients are aggressive. I do not think any nurse should be offended by being told that in difficult circumstances they have to stay compassionate.’

Neslyn Watson-Druée, a nurse and chief executive of Beacon Organisational Development, a consultancy that trains organisations in how to nurture and develop their staff, supports the NMC idea in principle, but added: ‘I do not think nurses get up in the morning and say to themselves that they are not going to be compassionate that day.’ Nurses themselves need to be shown compassion by employers, via supportive environments and good working conditions, she added.

The NMC will also examine whether to strengthen the section of the code that relates to delegation of nurses’ tasks. An NMC document on delegation and accountability was updated in May last year.

‘We have a working party to look in depth at the code, said Professor Ellis. ‘There isn’t much wrong with it, but it needs to be reviewed because it can get out of date.’

Patients show their appreciation for our nurse of the year

A celebration has been held for Nursing Standard nurse of the year Matthew Hodson by some of his patients.

Mr Hodson’s award was recognition for his work with patients who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He set up clinics at St Joseph’s Hospice and the Homerton Hospital in London.

Service user Patricia Alexander said: ‘It used to be that you came to a hospice to die, but I came here and learned to live all over again.’

Maqbul Alam Chowdury, Michael Kerin of St Joseph’s Hospice, Abdulkader Habib, Matthew Hodson and Patricia Alexander

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Question of the week
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Last week we asked: Is research an attractive career option for you?
Your response was ‘yes’ 56% and ‘no’ 44%