It is time to speak loudly, lobby MPs and respond to poor media coverage

Like nursing student Claire Docherty (Reflections July 31), I am distressed beyond belief that overstretched nurses are being blamed for the deficiencies in the NHS.

This government is asset-stripping and privatising our NHS. While ministers take an axe to it, they have the nerve to blame the healthcare professionals who are trying to hold it all together.

A recent NHS Retirement Fellowship conference heard the suggestion that older nurses and retired nurses should ‘prove their worth’ by making themselves available as unpaid mentors to today’s students.

This is nonsense. Anyone who has been retired for five years – never mind 20 – can be out of touch with the needs of today’s students, the curriculum and the teaching environment. But the thinking is all along the lines of ‘let’s squeeze something for nothing, and then blame the good-hearted’.

The powers-that-be have long relied on the fact that, as a profession, we nurses tend to steer clear of politics. But it is time to speak loudly, lobby MPs, complain to the media about unfair criticism, and go on the offensive. We need to spread the positive stories. They deserve to be heard.

Greta McGough, by email

EDITH CAVELL’S LIFE AND WORK DESERVE TO BE REMEMBERED

Commenting on Florence Nightingale, Baroness Cumberlege has complained: ‘She is being dropped from the national curriculum in favour of Mary Seacole and Edith Cavell, who contributed little by comparison’ (News July 31).

Cavell Nurses’ Trust is disappointed that Edith Cavell’s place in history is being questioned, along with her values and legacy. She epitomises today’s 6Cs of care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment.

The Department for Education wants primary school pupils to study famous individuals at different times in history and to compare their lives and work. Miss Nightingale and Mrs Seacole made significant contributions to health care in British hospitals in the Crimea in the 1850s, and later in England.

Many years later in 1907, British nurse Edith Cavell established the first school of nursing in Belgium and managed three hospitals, 24 communal schools for nurses, as well as giving four lectures a week to nurses and doctors.

She was executed in 1915 for helping 200 Allied soldiers to escape. Her heroism will be all the more poignant during next year’s commemorations to mark the centenary of the start of the first world war.

Her legacy continues today through the Cavell Nurses’ Trust, funded by the public subscriptions that were bequeathed after her death.

Our charity helps working and retired nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants who have fallen on hard times through, for example, ill-health, disability and domestic abuse, giving them the support and financial help they need to get back on their feet.

Kate Tompkins, chief executive, Cavell Nurses’ Trust, Redditch

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