students / highlights

Feeling like a fake
Does this scenario resonate? ‘I will never forget the first time I stepped onto a ward as a nursing student. I was living my dream. Then a lady called out for a nurse and I froze. I wasn’t a ‘real’ nurse. What was I to do?’
rcni.com/imposter-syndrome

A personal experience of poor end of life care spurred on student Susan Turton, pictured, to offer the best support she could to others. ‘When my mother died I vowed I would not let the families of my patients ever feel the way I did’
rcni.com/end-of-life-compassion

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Don’t let preconceptions limit you
Initial scepticism about a placement in a nursing home gave way to greater appreciation of the nurse-patient relationship

I had been looking forward to my first clinical placement since the moment I was offered a place at university. As a first-year nursing student, I thought at length about where I might get placed, and the wonderful opportunities this would offer.

Everyone in my cohort was excited when our first listings were posted. The class was divided into hubs of medical, surgical and community, and I was ecstatic to discover my first placement would be in the community.

There had been a lot of talk about the opportunities involved with district nurses, health visitors and practice nurses in GP surgeries, but as I scrolled through the list, my heart sank when I saw I had been placed in a nursing home.

I had expectations of what my community placement would entail, and this was certainly not it. I’m ashamed to say I considered my placement boring compared with those of the rest of my cohort and found myself feeling envious of the other students.

A friend who had recently qualified as a nurse encouraged me to keep an open mind and focus on the experiences I could gain from the placement rather than what I thought I would be missing out on. I knew she was right, but I still felt as though I’d drawn the short straw.

How wrong I was. On the first day of the placement, I shadowed the healthcare assistants (HCAs) working in the home, assisting clients with their day-to-day care needs and supporting maintenance of hygiene, fluid balance and nutrition.

This gave me the opportunity to spend time with each client, learning more about their needs and getting to know them as individuals. I also benefited from the knowledge and experience of the HCAs and developed a new-found appreciation for the fundamental role they play in the provision of care.

Focus on opportunities
In contrast with many other community services, which can see a vast number of patients and do not always allow for multiple experiences with an individual, the nursing home environment afforded me crucial time to build up a relationship with my clients.

As time progressed, I learned more about the people I was caring for, and by the end of the placement I had enjoyed it so much that I was disappointed to be leaving.

This experience taught me the importance of keeping an open mind and of remembering to focus on the merits and potential of any placement rather than my expectations.

I also learned that experiences are what you make them – the more effort you put into learning, the more you will get out of your placement. I will approach my next experience with an open mind and a positive outlook, embracing every opportunity.