JANE BATES

Fitted sheets are here but I’ll mourn for the hospital corner

Stop the world – I’m having a moment. I heard recently that we are going to have fitted sheets on our hospital beds. How has it come to this? Whatever will become of the hospital corner?

The first thing we learned as nursing students was how to sew our lacy hats, then hot on the heels of the headgear came bed making. I had expected by this time to learn something about patients, but uniform and hospital furniture came first.

We had to hone our bed making to perfection, completing the task in three minutes, with the hospital corners symmetrical, the pillow cases with the open edge facing away from the door and the wheels of the bed straight.

‘We had to hone bed making to perfection, completing the task in three minutes’

Never, we were instructed, make a bed on your own. This was considered the last word in time-wastage, meaning precious minutes gone forever. We listened, wide-eyed, getting the impression that to mislay the patient in this whirl of starched sheets and militarily lined-up linen would be considered preferable to the loss of those few moments. We did not understand then, of course, the crazy busyness of a hospital ward and that these were wise words – every second did indeed count.

Then there were draw sheets – long out of fashion now – pulled through to invigorate the bottom-to-bed experience and useful for turning people.

But it was the hospital corners that were icons of our profession; smart, efficient and orderly yet understated – everything that nurses were expected to be.

And now they will be replaced by elastic. It makes total sense. We should have done this years ago. But I can’t help but mourn their passing.

Jane Bates is an ophthalmic nurse in Hampshire

READERS’ PANEL

Does a toxic ‘put up and shut up’ culture still pervade the NHS?

Sadly, yes. It’s a self-sustaining culture, which I am just as guilty of by not reporting my own experiences of being bullied. Making a complaint is stressful, especially when it’s your word against the bully’s and that person is more senior than you. A simple cost-benefit rationale is enough for most people to decide that the cost of making the complaint outweighs the benefits, so a bullying culture pervades the NHS. Despite all NHS trusts having zero tolerance policies, the problem is still endemic.

Rachel Kent is a mental health nurse in London

A toxic bullying culture exists in the NHS, but I would argue that it extends far beyond the health service and that ‘putting up and shutting up’ seems part of the national psyche. The NHS has failed by not creating an environment where those who speak up are properly supported and protected. Fundamentally, this is a failure of management, and until those at the top are held accountable and action taken to properly tackle bullying, it will continue to be a concern.

Grant Byrne is a nursing student in Edinburgh

@GGByrne

Despite staff shortages, lack of equipment and the increased use of bank and agency staff, the attitude that nurses should just ‘get on with it’ still exists in the NHS. More needs to be done to ensure staff well-being, and the RCN’s support for the anti-bullying in healthcare campaign set up by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh is welcome. But until staff stop ‘putting up and shutting up’, the bullying culture that pervades the NHS will never change.

Beverley Ramdeen is a senior nursing lecturer in Hertfordshire

@BeverleyRamdeen

Healthcare workers are abused every day, by patients, relatives or colleagues. This is often seen by many as ‘just part of the job’, but the impact of abuse can be devastating. We need to build stronger relationships with each other and demonstrate the compassion we show to our patients, and managers need to act by supporting anti-bullying campaigns and ensuring concerns are taken seriously. We protect our patients but we also need to protect ourselves and each other.

Georgina Clayton is a nursing student in Southampton

@STNClayton90

Readers’ panel members give their views in a personal capacity only