briefing / comment

JANE BATES

Childhood obesity, train picnics and why we adults need to set an example

Put your Kit Kat on the floor… step away with your hands up! You are caught snacking on the bus and it’s a fair cop.

When I heard retiring chief medical officer Dame Sally Davies’ idea we ban snacking on public transport, I wondered if she was exaggerating to make a point.

Not taking a drink and nibbles on the bus or train is counter to our culture, and changing it would be like stopping a behemoth with a bacon butty.

Any attempt to address the childhood obesity crisis – professor Davies’ aim – must be enforceable. While the transport detectives rip chai lattes from our sticky hands and search for evidence of Cornish pasties, someone will have vandalised the train.

We do however, need to do something. Big problems necessitate big solutions. While writing this, I have eaten cheese, chocolate and grapes. I’m nibbling because I can. Professor Davies is right; we have become a nation of ruminants.

Snacking could be the new smoking

When I was a child in the 1950s and 60s, it was a breach of etiquette to eat in public. Food was for the table.

That’s not to say we didn’t have vices. You may not have seen anyone holding a sausage sandwich but plenty puffed cigarettes in enclosed spaces. It was the norm but look how attitudes have changed.

I use public transport regularly and will be hacked off if I can’t picnic on a long journey.

But that’s tough. If adults can set an example, so be it. It won’t kill me to delay my lunch, but childhood obesity leads to misery and morbidity.

When it was suggested smoking should be banned in public places, there was uproar, but that changed. We need a similar rethink on junk food. Soon.

Jane Bates is a retired nurse

READERS’ PANEL

Will evidence of inadequate care force government action on nurse shortages?

The RCN and countless others have spent years warning the government about the pressures facing the NHS in England. This CQC report is just the latest in a long line of documents that paint a picture of a health service increasingly struggling to cope with rising demand.

But with the distraction of Brexit, do we really think the public or politicians are paying attention? If we want change, we need to be prepared to fight for it.

All options, including strikes, must be considered.

Grant Byrne is a nursing student in Edinburgh
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The recent Queen’s Speech made no mention of the nurse staffing crisis, highlighting the government’s lack of concern. When ministers do mention the shortage, they say they’re training more nurses, as if a newly qualified nurse can replace one with years of experience.

Every year we have these warnings of shortages, yet the government does next to nothing. Cuts, increasing workloads, no real pay rise and Brexit scaring off EU nurses, all make the situation worse. If this doesn’t make ministers act, what will?

Liz Charalambous is a staff nurse and PhD student in Nottingham
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Healthcare services are running on goodwill and the gargantuan efforts of staff. Philosopher and political activist Noam Chomsky said governments intentionally create the circumstances for privatisation by underfunding services. What follows is public anger when things don’t work… then a sell-off.

I am not optimistic ministers see the nurse staffing crisis as a priority – it seems to fit their neoliberal agenda and I very much doubt they will act now.

Drew Payne is a community staff nurse in north London
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When nurses are in short supply, they become a highly prized commodity. With more vacancies than nurses, it really is a nurses’ market. So while we wait for the government to reintroduce the bursary and train new nurses to fill the growing number of vacancies, employers need to do more to recruit and retain us.

NHS staff are under pressure to get results, meet targets and satisfy patients – in under-resourced environments. Nurses are voting with their feet. And they are walking out.

Rachel Kent is a mental health nurse in London

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