

How can nurses care if their organisation doesn't care for them?



Debbie Hicks
Nurse Consultant – Diabetes,
Enfield Community Services,
Barnet, Enfield & Haringey
Mental Health Trust, Enfield

Following the publication of the *Francis Report* (Francis, 2013), I was invited to attend a “listening event” by the Chief Executive of my Trust. My cynical self would say that this was a shallow attempt to assess staff morale in the light of the report’s findings. Much of what was raised at the event was operational in nature, such as the fiasco following the implementation of a new IT system. However, some solutions to issues that were identified have actually been implemented. Surprisingly, staffing issues did not seem high on the agenda. Is this because we have just become accustomed to working with fewer staff members?

Royal College of Nursing report

Unfortunately, findings from a new report from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) show that patient care in the UK is being put at risk by staff cuts and excessive workloads, leading to unprecedented nurse stress and ill health. The Royal College of Nursing’s *Beyond Breaking Point?* survey involved over 2000 nursing staff working in a range of settings across the NHS and the private sector (RCN, 2013). The survey found that 55% of the nurses had been made unwell by stress over the previous year. The most significant causes of stress are being unable to deliver the care they would like, increasing workloads, feeling unsupported by managers and the rapid pace of change.

Despite this, the majority of nurses (82%) reported that they have gone to work despite feeling too ill to do so, raising concerns that safe patient care could be jeopardised. Personally, I have gone to work in the past with a really bad cold, as it would appear petty to take time off work for what seems a trivial illness, but the fact that you do turn up for work just means you risk inflicting the same on your work colleagues and the people you care for, which is not very

caring at all! Furthermore, working whilst ill can prolong the illness, so the problem persists.

Violence and bullying

It is sad and shocking to learn that more than half (56%) of survey respondents reported that they have experienced verbal or physical violence from patients or service users over the last year, while around one in five (23%) reported being bullied by managers.

Dr Peter Carter, Chief Executive & General Secretary of the RCN said:

“In the aftermath of the Francis Inquiry, it is clearer than ever that working cultures in the NHS and beyond have a direct and serious effect on the level of care that staff can provide to patients. Our whole care system is currently facing the huge challenge of delivering care at a time of increased demand and scant resource. This is the reality which nurses face in every working day.”

The impact on diabetes nurses

This current situation within diabetes specialist nursing is that vacant posts are being frozen as a cost-cutting exercise and there are many nurses, like myself, who are ready to retire from the NHS within the next couple of years. In a speciality, such as diabetes, where the number of people with diabetes is increasing at a rapid rate, it is a worrying situation that the number of DSNs are on the decline. Or are we just wearing them out – mentally and physically? ■

Francis R (2013) *Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry*. Available at: <http://www.midstaffpublicinquiry.com/> (accessed 02.10.13)

Royal College of Nursing (2013) *Beyond breaking point? A survey report of RCN members on health, wellbeing and stress*. RCN, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/15Er0ev> (accessed 02.10.13)