

Is nursing really that bad?



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Now that my retirement is only days away, I have been reminiscing about the last 37 years of my nursing career with my team. My newest and youngest member of the team was open mouthed as we explained how we were trained to be nurses by the “hands-on” approach, way before Project 2000 nurses. How novel! We recalled how we were allocated a task before each shift and took pride in completing that task for a number of patients on the ward before the nursing team served lunch.

All the patients had their needs met by a number of nurses – not just a named nurse. No patient waited for a bed bath or an immersion bath until after lunch and no patients had to drink the flower water because they could not get a nurse to bring them fresh drinking water! What has gone so horribly wrong with nursing and the NHS?

I was very sad to read the recent results from a Royal College of Nursing (RCN) survey, which states that “nursing morale has dropped through the floor”. The online survey, which was produced by the Labour Research Department on behalf of the RCN, was sent to a stratified random sample of the RCN membership and 4137 responses were received.

The survey found that 56% reported that too much time is spent on non-nursing duties, with 59% saying that they are too busy to provide the level of care that they would like. Furthermore, 43% have seen an increase in the number of patients they are being asked to care for, while 42% of those in the NHS reported recruitment freezes where they work.

More than a third (34%) say that bullying and harassment is a problem in their workplace; 82% had worked when not feeling well enough to do so and 46% said the main reason was work-related stress. It’s really sad that fewer than half (45%) would recommend nursing as a career and 29% do not feel nursing will offer them a secure job in the future.

Over half (53%) have worked extra hours to earn money to pay for bills and other everyday living

expenses. With ongoing pay restraints, there should be concerns about keeping experienced staff in the profession. One nurse said:

“The ward is intense and busy. We are running ourselves into the ground, not taking breaks and leaving an hour after shifts end to get all our work done. We should get paid a lot more for this amount of pressure.”

Is there any wonder mistakes are made if NHS staff are working under this kind of pressure? Are we not just waiting for another Mid Staffordshire situation to occur? By some of the news reports I am hearing, I would not be surprised.

Josie Irwin, Head of Employment Relations at the RCN, said:

“Nursing staff are being placed in intolerable situations, working themselves sick and still not feeling they have been able to deliver the care they would like... Many nurses skip every break, work late after every shift, do their paperwork in their own time, and the pressure just increases... Employers, the NHS and the government need to work together to ensure that there are enough nurses, with the right level of skills, where they are needed.”

An article in *The Guardian* (Boffey, 2015) reported that figures from the Nursing and Midwifery Council show that in 2009–10, 11% of nurses were recruited from abroad and in 2014–15 that proportion rose to 29%. Around 7500 of those were recruited from the EU, particularly Spain, Italy and Portugal, with 665 from further afield, including the Philippines.

It costs thousands of pounds of NHS money to recruit nurses from other countries, money which could be spent on training our own nurses – is this yet another short-term saving that costs us more money in the future. I think so. ■

Boffey D (2015) NHS has to recruit one in four nurses from abroad. *The Guardian*, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1DHUIN0> (accessed 05.10.15)

Royal College of Nursing (2015) *Nursing morale has “dropped through the floor.”* RCN, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1LbBG2m> (accessed 06.10.15)