

A little bit of learning can go a long way

Jo-Anna Grove

The renowned author Maya Angelou famously said that, 'People will forget what you said and what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.'

This quote came to mind when I was recently asked to undertake an MSc. I was uncertain as to how this would affect my nursing practice and I was doubtful of my academic abilities. I also admit to feeling a little cynical as to whether education would have much effect on my day-to-day patient interactions. I have never believed that a textbook could teach someone how to deal with a patient on a one-to-one basis. Patients are individuals and while some may appreciate a tactile approach, others certainly do not. The 'gut feelings' we all have about patients are not gleaned from poring over textbooks, but through experiential learning absorbed during the course of caring.

I consider myself privileged to do what I do, in that patients put their trust in me to help them with their wounds. I listen and talk to them and they often say, 'You're the first person who has actually explained this to me properly.'

So, has the higher level study actually changed the way I interact with patients? On one hand I would say 'No'. We all have personal and professional standards

and I pride myself on making every patient feel that I have all the time in the world for them. None of this has changed as a result of my study. I will still sit and listen, hold a hand where appropriate, allow time for questions and encourage patients to discuss their fears and anxieties.

On the other hand, I have to admit that in some ways the course has helped me enormously — not necessarily with actual patient consultations, but more with the thought processes that go into planning interventions.

One of my colleagues recently told me that studying at MSc level would change the way I thought, rather than the way I 'did', and I would have to agree with her. The course welcomes students from all over the world and it is interesting to see that, despite coming from different health cultures, some where patients receive care free at the point of delivery, and others where they have to pay, our goals and objectives are always the same — to provide evidence-based quality care.

It is also interesting to study with various members of the multidisciplinary team, where everyone, be they a nurse, doctor, or podiatrist, has a viewpoint that can positively contribute to the learning experience. In that sense we are all on a level playing field with no one professional group being superior to another. I have found that this sense of equality and shared learning enhances working practices with your colleagues.

The speed of modern technology also means that we can communicate

with fellow professionals in other countries without necessarily being in the same room, which has been a great asset as far as my study is concerned. Twenty-first century technology, such as email and video-conferencing, have also benefited patient care, as new techniques can be shared across the world. The work of the National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (NPUAP) and the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (EPUAP) is a great example of how clinicians can work together and develop guidelines that are adopted across the globe (www.epuap.org/guidelines).

But, does it matter to patients if clinicians have higher level degrees? Probably not. What patients care about is whether you can relieve their pain, reduce their exudate levels, or minimise wound odour. Patients want to be listened to and have their concerns acted upon. However, the beauty of higher level study is that your clinical decisions will be taken with the confidence gained from deeper understanding.

I am aware that nursing is all-graduate in some countries, and it is moving in that direction here in the UK. For anyone in doubt, as I was initially, don't be put off! The hard work is worth it when your patient tells you that you have done a great job and you know that your underpinning knowledge made a contribution. While higher-level study may not alter your professional standards, it will enhance them, and the person due to benefit most from this is your patient. **WUK**

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