

In difficult times the NHS still delivers top quality care

David Gray

As you may know, I divide my time between working for Wounds UK and the department of tissue viability at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Our clinical team has had a pretty turbulent time recently, with three of us viewing the NHS from the other side of the fence as either patients or as close relatives of patients. It has been a very trying time for all concerned, not least because our clinical service has to be provided come what may.

It has given us all an opportunity to reflect on the NHS and what it means to patients and their families when they are really ill. I guess there is a tendency for those of us who work in the NHS to see the downside of the service — the threats to jobs, the cutbacks and the frustrations of working in a huge organisation which can sometimes fail to make staff feel valued. However, for the vast majority of patients their experience of the NHS is somewhat different. Their focus is obviously on what is happening to themselves or their loved ones.

Even when things do not go to plan or turn out as they wish, the reality is that our patients and their relatives truly value the service they are given. Sadly the few cases where complaints are made tend to be given prominence in the media which leads to staff developing a distorted view of how the public perceive us. Perhaps we forget just how grateful the people who

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use the NHS are and that if there was no NHS, times of ill-health could be so much more traumatic in terms of the financial impact upon families and upon reduced levels of service.

We have all had very different experiences. One of my colleagues lost a close relative after three months in intensive care and a long, dignified battle. Another colleague, Pam Cooper,

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experienced the NHS at the opposite end of the scale after giving birth to a baby girl on the 15th February. So we have experienced both joy and sadness as outsiders looking into the NHS.

In my own case, my son developed periorbital cellulitis over Christmas and ended up spending 21 days in hospital following a resistant infection which led to intensive antibiotic therapy and neurosurgery during his stay. Thankfully he has made a full recovery and is back on top form.

However, as a father watching his child become seriously ill and requiring the intervention of intensive nursing, four different medical teams, microbiology, hospital catering, pharmacy, play therapy, physiotherapy and others, I now have a completely different appreciation of

the organisation I have worked in for 23 years. When the chips were down the NHS delivered and not just in terms of treatment, but on every level. The compassion and warmth of all the non-clinical staff we encountered cannot be underestimated and made a real difference. The professionalism of NHS clinical staff — some of whom we met and others we did not, such as those in pharmacy and microbiology — was staggering. It took this experience to help me understand that most people in the UK view the NHS as a service that more often than not delivers a world class service day by day. It is not utopia and there are many things we need to change in terms of culture and practice so that we can improve, but as I watched my son in the aftermath of surgery being cared for in an expert manner I was forced to reflect on how it might have been had we lived in a developing country or were required to find funds to make the treatment possible.

The NHS is not perfect and I have huge sympathy with colleagues whose jobs are under threat, but it is worth remembering that while they may not make a song and dance about it or even give it a mention, the vast majority of patients we treat think that the service you provide is brilliant. **WUK**

This is my final column as Editor of Wounds UK. I am pleased to announce that John Timmons will be taking over the role in June. I am certain that he along with the editorial team and board members will continue to take the journal from strength to strength. I will remain involved with the journal as part of the editorial board, and would like to thank everyone who has supported the journal since its launch.