“Today’s nurses must find time for the fluffy stuff”

Early last year my local NHS trust launched three promises to hospital patients. It would make them feel welcomed, cared for and in safe hands as part of an organisational development programme, which was called “For one and all: improving your experience”.

As a cynical healthcare writer, I couldn’t help but wonder if these buzzwords were what really mattered to patients. And did staff already run ragged on a daily basis really have time for all that “fluffy stuff”? As the wife of a nurse, I had no illusions about the pressures of working at today’s NHS coalface.

And then I was admitted to hospital. Just before Christmas, I underwent an emergency laparotomy and spent the following week recovering on a surgical ward.

As I waited to be sedated, the consultant anaesthetist commented that everyone involved in shaping, planning, delivering and even writing about healthcare would benefit from seeing the NHS through the eyes of a patient. She was right.

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I am equally grateful that the nurses who made a point of telling me how concerned she had been when I developed a complication; and the bank nurse who made herself available to talk about my aches, my fears and my two young children in the dead of night.

Their competence was evident in everything they did, from explaining what they were going to do and patiently answering my questions, to assuaging my embarrassment as they bathed me and helped me to feel that little bit more human, they made me feel that they really cared. And that was exactly what I needed.

I also really appreciated their sense of humour (let’s just say I wouldn’t want to be seen in public in a pair of thromboembolus deterrent stockings).

All the staff who took the time to share a smile, comment or anecdote during the busy working day made a whole world of difference to my hospital stay.

At a time when the 6Cs have been thrown into sharp focus, there can be no doubt that today’s nurses can, and must, find time for the “fluffy stuff”. My own experience was one of quite outstanding care and compassion, despite all the pressures they face.

When I was discharged, I felt unexpectedly emotional. I had only known the staff on ward 10 at Walsall Healthcare Trust briefly, but during that time they had made me feel welcomed, cared for and in safe hands, and for that I am truly grateful.

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