“Does it really need to be so tough to become a nurse?”

I’m writing this from London, where I’m in the middle of my dream elective placement: a week in paediatric intensive care and a week at Great Ormond Street Hospital. I’m so excited about what I’m learning over these two weeks; it couldn’t be more different to the general children’s nursing that makes up most of my training, but I can’t help wishing hard for the end.

The reason? Once these two weeks are over, I’ll have finished year two of my training. It’s really been a tough year, and I definitely wasn’t prepared for how difficult it would be.

It has felt like a constant whirlwind of placements, work, essays, more work and exams. An unrelenting level of stress never seems to subside. There have not been enough hours in the day to do the reading I need to do, and I’m hoping against hope that next year, my third year, won’t be quite so tough.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not unhappy – I love what I do and wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. I’m proud of how hard I’ve worked this year and how well I’m doing. But does it really need to be so tough or because they don’t know what else to do. Yes we care, and we will be good nurses, but keep making it so tough and people just won’t want to do it. There won’t be the students needed to plug the predicted shortfall in nurses, and those who do qualify won’t want to stay.

It’s no good just looking into how to make pre-registration education better, it needs to be made more attractive to potential nurses, to change the minds of those who look at the financial picture and find they can’t afford to do the training. Those who attend an open day to be told they will be on 13-hour shifts during every single one of their child’s half-term holidays need to be convinced.

Good nurses come from good training, but what do we get from intense, chaotic, stressful training? Is it too much to ask for policy makers to talk to students about what would improve our education? I don’t think so.

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