Learning from our mistakes and our successes makes us better nurses. You do not have to participate in dangerous pursuits to be able to reflect on what worked well and what did not. As health professionals, we should take time to reflect as part of our everyday work. Reflection on good and bad things makes a positive difference.

Why is the simple act of reflection easy to say but hard to do? It is because we are busy people and wherever we work, we do not have the time to think about the past. We are too busy thinking about what we need to do right now.

Often time is not made available to think about the consequences of our previous actions and the impact they have had on others as we struggle with the next challenge. But this approach to nursing is not in accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s Code.

As a consequence, we are not delivering our best in terms of care on all levels and at all times. We of course owe it to our residents, patients and clients to give our best – all day, every day.

This is where we need to take time out to reflect on what has worked well and what could have worked better. Then we need to make a plan to share what has worked well and to look at putting measures in place to ensure that what did not work well does not happen again.

Taking time to reflect may not always be easy to do but the professional consequences of not reflecting are too great. Reflection doesn’t have to be a huge event. You can reflect any time anywhere – on your journey home, when you are lying in the bath, out running or winding down from the day.

Where and how you reflect is not the issue. The issue is that you find the time that works for you.

Reflection is not optional, nor is it a task we just do because otherwise we would not be able to revalidate. It should be a means to make a positive difference to those we care for.

‘Pressing the pause button’ and taking time to reflect is essential, especially as we frequently deal with difficult and emotional situations in our professional lives. Pressing pause is that time to reflect at whatever level of nursing job we are in.

We need to ask ourselves: Did I do the best I could have done? Did I manage the situation as well as I could have done? What would I do differently if I had the time again? How do I share this with my peers?

As a senior manager of a nursing team, I frequently ask these questions, not only of myself but of those in my team. Asking them doesn’t automatically link to a job done badly but provides an opportunity to reflect on the situations to learn and celebrate what worked well.

That final point is one we spend so little time on. Our natural stance seems to be to focus on the negatives and not to celebrate what has worked well. Reflection is also an opportunity to think positively about things too.

Thinking positively has so many benefits – not least boosting the morale of an individual or team. It also creates energy and with that energy comes a passion to achieve and do well. So who benefits from reflective practice? Ultimately it is the people we care for.

So today in your role as a nurse, find time to hit the pause button and take the time to reflect. It will make a difference to your day and that of the people you care for, their families and your peers. NT

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