

A commitment to making things better

We hope that all nurses are committed to what they do, but what does that really mean? **Clare Price-Dowd**, Senior Programme Lead, NHS Leadership Academy, explores why commitment is fundamental for a nurse



When you tell people you're a nurse, one of the first things they say is: 'You must be so dedicated—you need so much commitment to be a nurse.' But commitment is more than the quality of being truly dedicated to something.

Commitment to improving the experience of patients, carers and colleagues

Yes, we get paid to do what we do, but there's something about commitment—that emotional attachment to being a nurse—that takes doing your job to a whole other level. Underneath the tasks, the thing that goes right through the middle of nursing like words through a stick of rock is a commitment to making things better. Commitment is about striving for continuous improvement, constantly looking at things and exploring ways of doing them differently. If we don't have this desire to make things better then at best they'll stay as they are, but at worst, they'll start to deteriorate.

For me, this unwavering wish to continue making things better for patients, carers and colleagues so that we're practising in the optimum environment is all part of the commitment that goes with being a nurse.

Commitment to ourselves as nurses

Nurses are committed to caring for those around them, but you can't pour from an empty cup. The commitment to others is only any good if we extend it to ourselves, taking a little bit of time to self-care. Maybe your

shift didn't go as you'd hoped or something happened that meant you didn't get that stack of paperwork done. Maybe you were slightly later getting to somewhere at the end of the day. Whatever it was, don't beat yourself up! There's always a good reason why our days go haywire and sometimes it's purely the commitment we have for the job that means that happens. If we weren't committed, we'd walk out at the end of the shift and it would be somebody else's problem to sort out. But no, we stay, we show discretionary effort to colleagues and patients to make sure they stay safe and get the best possible quality of care.

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Being committed to ourselves as nurses also involves keeping up to date with the most relevant and evidence-based treatments and services, as well as making sure we maintain our registration through the new validation process. I've recently been through this and it really made me think about what it means to be a nurse.

Even though I don't work in frontline practice anymore, I thought about being committed to the profession of nursing and keeping updated, reading, talking to peers and learning from each other. We can also gain new insight from patients and the people we meet every day. Keeping up to date means you'll stay in a position that will enable you to practise effectively, but it also means that, sometimes, you can do a great job while being kind to yourself and the people around you.

Commitment to the profession

Being a nurse never leaves you; it starts from the minute you go into training and

stays with you your whole life. You don't stop being a nurse when you take off your uniform; you're always a nurse. From the first day that you put on your nursing uniform, you're telling the world that you chose caring as a career. That's a pretty amazing feeling.

Upholding and staying committed to the professional values of nursing is paramount. I have friends and colleagues who have decided not to continue with their professional registration for various reasons, but the minute you get into a conversation with them about what they do, they always tell you they're a nurse by background.

And it doesn't finish when you retire; nursing skills are skills for life. It's not just the clinical skills but the interpersonal skills, the caring skills, the logical-thinking skills, the problem-solving skills, the analytical skills—everything that you are as a nurse comes together into a beautiful package of skills you can apply anywhere.

For me, commitment should also include being mindful of how we portray ourselves on social media and asking what that says about the profession of nursing. In our multimedia world, it's sometimes easy to forget that things are open to everybody else to see. Nowadays, we're only a click away from all of the information we need on anyone and everyone. Just as patients can be incredibly savvy about their treatments, they're also likely to search for information on their surgeon, their hospital and any prescribed treatments.

I think that as people in the nursing profession, we should be savvy about what we share about our activities outside of work. You could argue that on social media this really shouldn't matter, but for me it does. Think how easy it is for anyone to access your public profile, how easy it is to portray a version of ourselves that lays us open to criticism. A senior colleague told me recently they always have a look at social media profiles of candidates prior to interviewing—think about what yours might say about you, if you are thinking of a career move. I'm not saying

we shouldn't share information, only that it's a question of balance and being mindful about what we share publicly. It's about being committed to upholding the professional values of nursing.

The subtext of all of the above is that nursing isn't something you can do if you're not wholly committed to the profession. I'd even go as far as saying you'll do more harm than good. Patients—particularly the vulnerable and the elderly—want to feel

cared for. They have a right to feel respected and cared for, and that will come from people who are committed to the art and science of nursing, committed to making sure that they get better and giving patients and carers the best experience possible in the life they have left. That can only be delivered by people who uphold the values.

However, I'm definitely not saying it's easy to maintain this commitment all the time. When you're working on a busy ward that is

under-staffed and you feel under-valued, it's easy to ask why you should be committed when nobody is committed to you. Now more than ever we need to be resilient and draw on the inner strength we all have.

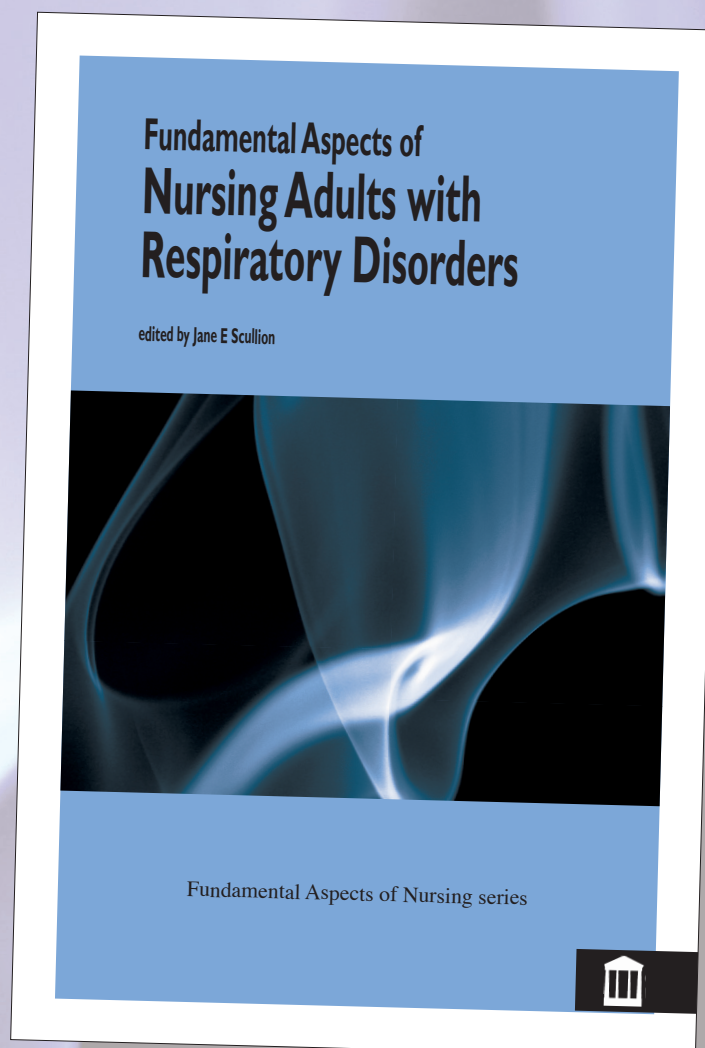
For colleagues whose vocation is nursing, it is often a reward in itself. The reward of knowing you gave the highest quality care you could and knowing you did that as part of a team of colleagues who share your commitment. **BJN**

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