Attitudes are contagious; are yours worth catching?

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It has been argued by psychologists and other professionals for many years that quite often the outcomes of situations can be influenced simply by our attitudes.

As we all know, the National Health Service is under a great deal of strain and pressure and the nursing profession, in particular, is struggling. All of us have a part to play in enhancing and improving this service.

As nurses, we often work in busy and stressful environments, ranging from acute hospital settings to clinics and patients’ homes. We often meet people when they are vulnerable with varying emotions and problems and at different stages of their lives. We interact with people who have a variety of conditions and needs and are put in positions of trust and responsibility. Moreover, in our daily working lives, we interact with different colleagues and staff and come into contact with a wide variety of individuals.

Winston Churchill once said that ‘attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference’, and it really doesn’t take too long for one difficult attitude within a healthcare team to filter through to colleagues, patients and relatives and create problems for many. Having a positive attitude can make such a huge difference to all those that we come into contact with on a daily basis. Body language along with the tone of voice we use, and the manner in which we physically present ourselves, in addition to attentiveness, punctuality, verbal dialogue and the general respect that we show to others have a direct impact on those around us, the environments in which we work, and how we treat our patients.

Point 8 of the Nursing and Midwifery (NMC) ‘Code of conduct’ explores the requirement for nurses to work cooperatively with colleagues. This involves valuing others and showing them respect; it involves acknowledging the contribution others may bring to a particular situation and maintaining effective communication with colleagues and giving them a sense of self-worth.

As nurses, working cooperatively with colleagues is an obligation, not an option, and even when working relationships may be challenging, we should approach them with maturity and common sense, remembering that the focus of our relationships is always either directly or indirectly the care of a person with a healthcare need.

A research report published in 2014 by the Health and Care Professionals Council stated that professional behaviours are seen to be the expression of professional attitudes. It is important to remember that professional attitudes are heavily influenced by communication. Communication within the fast-paced and ever-changing healthcare service comes in many forms and, of course, between many different individuals. Communication can be verbal and non-verbal — whichever method is used, it should be undertaken with respect and appropriate to the circumstances at a particular time. Using language that colleagues and patients can understand, not being patronising or condescending, can make an enormous difference to how others perceive and elect to interact with us.

Negative situations do not necessarily require a negative response, and if confronted with negativity from those around us we should challenge it in a positive and respectful manner. If we, as healthcare professionals, are to meet the needs of our patients and be supportive and friendly towards colleagues, we must have kind, sensitive, compassionate and honest attitudes at all times. If we try to create an air of positivity in situations where others are negative, we may have the ability to really change others’ perspectives of a particular situation. Attitudes really are contagious, perhaps those of us working within the health service should make sure we have positive and energising attitudes that other people will want to catch.

REFERENCES

Health and Care Professionals Council (2014) Professionalism in healthcare professionals. London