

The problem



Fig. 1.1 Don't believe everything you see on TV.

Nurses in television soap operas and teenage novels are often romantic heroes and heroines. Even though they are towers of strength, they will still fall hopelessly in love with handsome doctors, weep with the pain of a broken heart when their love affair goes wrong but smile in quiet triumph when they save the life of a child who has been rushed in to A&E. You would think that everyone would want to be a nurse. But no. The truth is that though things are getting much better, the job has become unpopular and now many nurses want to get out of the profession as fast as they can. If only real life were like television!

What has gone wrong? The following letter is from a nurse who believes he knows the answer to this question.

VOCABULARY

to put upon: to exploit and ask too much.

where is the money coming from?: in the letter this question expresses an ultra-practical attitude.

an allowance: pocket money or regular income from a (rich) relative.

overdrawn: to have drawn more money from your bank account than you had in it.

to fool (themselves): to tell (themselves) something which is not true.

Dear Colleague,

I can tell you who is causing the crisis. We are! The nurses! We nurses accept the staff shortages and try to do the impossible. We allow employers to put upon us. We accept unpaid overtime and we accept punishment when we make understandable mistakes.

In my clinic I see 105 patients with various fractures in only 4 hours. The morning clinic finishes two-and-a-half hours after the afternoon clinic begins. I get no tea break, no meal break and it is usual practice to leave late in the afternoons.

We must stop fooling ourselves that being respected is what counts. A bank manager said to me, because I was overdrawn again, 'look - you may be a nice person who does a very important job, and society needs you, but where is the money coming from?'

Florence Nightingale did nurses a great disservice by only employing girls from 'good' families where Daddy paid for his daughter's training. She got an allowance of course and the best nurses were totally obedient and knew their place.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL JENNER



Fig. 1.2 Furiously Yours, Paul Jenner RN.

Exercise 1a

In this exercise extracts are taken from the letter you have just read. After each extract there are three sentences (a, b & c). Say which of the three sentences is closest in meaning to the extract.

- 1 The writer of the letter says: 'We nurses accept the staff shortages'. What does he mean?
 Either: a. We don't mind the present situation.
 Or: b. We do nothing about the present situation.
 Or: c. We cannot live with the present situation.
- 2 'We try to do the impossible' means:
 Either: a. We are asked to do amazing things.
 Or: b. Even when we know we can't do something, we still try.
 Or: c. We never succeed at what we do.
- 3 When the writer says 'We accept punishment when we make understandable mistakes' he means:
 Either: a. We blame others when something goes wrong.
 Or: b. It's all our fault and we deserve the punishment we get.
 Or: c. It's not our fault we make mistakes, but we take the blame anyway.
- 4 'We must stop fooling ourselves that being respected is what counts' means:
 Either: a. We are stupid to think that getting respect is more important than, say, money.
 Or: b. We must stop thinking we are respected. We aren't.
 Or: c. We are being stupid when we think we are being clever.
- 5 When the writer's bank manager asks 'Where is the money coming from?' he means:
 Either: a. Who pays you?
 Or: b. How do you want to pay – cash, cheque or credit card?
 Or: c. You don't earn enough.
- 6 'Florence Nightingale did nurses a great disservice' means:
 Either: a. Florence Nightingale did a lot for nurses.
 Or: b. Florence Nightingale refused to help nurses.
 Or: c. Florence Nightingale did no favours to nurses.

Exercise 1b

Practise the vocabulary that is used in the nurse's letter by filling in the spaces in the following sentences from the options a, b, c and d.

- 1 Nurses have to try to do things.
 a. the impossible
 b. impossible
 c. this impossible
 d. impossibly
- 2 The writer's patients have of fractures.
 a. variety
 b. various
 c. a variety
 d. varied

Fig. 13 The Mission of Mercy: Florence Nightingale receiving the wounded at Scutari. This famous painting by Jerry Barrett represents the popular view of the founder of modern nursing. However, recent biographies describe Florence Nightingale as a difficult and obsessive person. Some nurses are now saying she did nursing no favours. By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



- 3** The writer thinks we have ourselves for too long.
- fooled
 - fooling
 - foolish
 - fool
- 4** His bank won't let him any further.
- overdrawn
 - overdraft
 - overdraw
 - overdrew
- 5** In the past, in nurses was a virtue.
- obedience
 - obedient
 - obey
 - obeyed



Fig. 14 When will nurses' pay reflect the importance of the work they do?

Exercise 1c

In the following text, choose a word from each of the brackets which fits in the space.

Many nurses in Britain say that the profession (are, is, were) held back by pay and status. They say that the National Health Service (NHS) is still conservative (mind, to mind, minded), that nurses are still subordinate (by, with, to) doctors and that their professional judgement (do, don't, does) not get enough respect. They say that (though, if, when) Florence Nightingale's heart was (in, on, at) the right place, she has helped to keep an (out dated, undated, up to date) image of the profession. They say that it is time to (rid, riddance, get rid) of the Florence Nightingale (pictorial, imagine, image) and that (nurses, nurse, nurses') pay should reflect the (important, importantly, importance) of the work they do.

Working conditions and the crisis

VOCABULARY

at risk: in danger.

trolley: temporary bed on wheels for moving patients around.

overflowing: too many – not enough space.

to be stuck: to be unable to get out, move.

retention (from to retain): keeping nurses in the profession.

to be put off: to decide not to do something (e.g. train to be a nurse) because it is made unattractive.



Nurses working in the NHS say that the present crisis is not just a matter of pay but also of working conditions and job satisfaction. Overcrowding in the hospitals, they say, is preventing them from doing their jobs properly and is sometimes even putting patients at risk.

Describing the situation at her hospital, one nurse said, 'The number of patients has been rising and, partly because of the nurse shortages, there are fewer beds. Patients become backed up in A&E and it is very, very common to see every corridor full of people waiting on trolleys – the department is often full to overflowing. Nearly 60% of the hospital's admissions arrive as emergencies – and almost always they have to wait on trolleys before a bed becomes free. Then, for those who need further hospital care, there is often a long wait before they can be moved to an in-patient ward. Last Monday, for example, 14 people were stuck in A&E waiting for a bed. Some had been waiting for the whole weekend.'

Because of the demand for surgical beds, hospital staff have difficult decisions to make about who to get ready for surgery, and there is a daily risk of cancellations.

Though most nurses say that poor pay and conditions have led to the recruitment and retention crisis in nursing, some add that modern training is too academic. They criticise recent changes in training for putting too much emphasis on academic qualifications and too little on practical skills. Many would-be nurses who do not have a strong academic interest have been put off and training nurses in the classroom rather than at the bedside has also led to fewer trainee nurses being available on the wards.

A report from the Government's Social Affairs Unit said, 'There is too much emphasis on status, managerial skills and the technical skills for operating medical equipment and not enough emphasis on the traditional role of nurses – comforting, feeding and bathing the sick.'

Exercise 1d

Check your understanding of the text above by answering these questions:

- 1 We are told 'there are fewer beds in hospitals' (2nd paragraph). This is because:
 - a. there are more patients now.
 - b. of more than one reason.
 - c. there are too few nurses.
- 2 'Patients' who 'become backed up' (2nd paragraph) are people:
 - a. with back injuries.
 - b. who have changed their minds about staying in hospital.
 - c. waiting their turn.
- 3 There are people who 'had been waiting for the whole weekend' (2nd paragraph). These are:
 - a. patients who had been waiting since Saturday morning.

- b. patients who waited over Sunday.
- d. patients who were waiting until Saturday morning.

4 Hospital staff have to decide 'who to get ready for surgery' (3rd paragraph). In other words they:

- a. have to decide which of the staff are going to work in surgery.
- b. can't decide who goes first.
- c. have to work out which patients have priority.

5 'Would be nurses' (4th paragraph) are:

- a. people training to be nurses.
- b. people who might become nurses.
- c. people who used to be nurses.

Agency nurses: a sticking plaster solution

VOCABULARY

a sticking plaster solution:
a temporary solution.

morale: spirit and sense of well-being.

stressed: unhappy and overworked.

flexibly: quickly adapting to changes.

cover: someone who does your work when you are not able to.

competent: able, capable.

incentives: encouragement, reward.

continuity: unbroken line.

The situation in the hospitals has led to a **stressed** workforce that suffers poor **morale** and to a profession that is not attractive to potential new recruits. The gaps in staffing are filled by the extensive use of private agency staff. This is expensive, sometimes very expensive. One hospital manager in the north of England said 'the situation has become so bad that some NHS Trusts in Leeds are paying private agency nurses to travel from London (about 200 miles) because they are unable to recruit nurses from the local area.'

He said, 'In the past, hospitals used agency nurses to top up nursing levels, but now we have no alternative but to rely on them day to day to make sure we are adequately staffed. We are very short of money but we're having to pay private nurses very high rates of pay just to keep wards open.'

'To attract nurses back into the NHS they must be paid properly and be able to combine work with family responsibilities. We're doing things like trying to get people who are out of nursing practice back in, getting out to supermarkets and holding road shows, offering term-time contracts, job shares, and generally work more **flexibly** than in the past. But this all takes time and our problems are now.'

In the meantime, the hospitals have to find nurse **cover**. Often, that comes from temporary nurses. They are of two kinds – bank nurses, who are a pool of NHS nurses, and nurses from commercial agencies. Hospitals tend to have their own 'bank', made up of nurses who work at the hospital and who want to do extra shifts or simply work part-time as and when shifts come up. The fear has been raised that temporary nurses are working in areas with which they are unfamiliar, and placing patients at risk.

One ward sister said: 'We have had people turn up for duty when, in the opinion of the ward sister, they have not been **competent** in that area. So they have been sent back to the agency.' She also said that at her hospital they have had to increase pay rates for specialist areas such as cardiology and intensive care, because agencies are offering huge **incentives** to staff to go to London and work for them there.



Fig. 1.6 Employers are offering all sorts of incentives.

In an interview with the BBC, Liz Jenkins, Assistant General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) pointed out that 'in addition to the fact that employing an agency nurse costs more than employing a staff nurse, when you get too many agency nurses, you get no continuity of care. The patient in their bed sees a different person every day who doesn't understand their condition, who may not even know much about the hospital they work in.'

Exercise 1e

Using words which are in the vocabulary lists in front of the previous two areas of text, complete the following sentences. The words will have to be changed in some small way (the first one is done as an example).

- The ward began to fill up and by eight o'clock the queue had into the corridor. (meaning: what happens when there is no space).
Answer: The ward began to fill up and by eight o'clock the queue had overflowed into the corridor.
- She had no idea about how to do the job and was sacked for being (meaning: not able to work effectively).
- Low pay is never a good to work hard. (meaning: a reward which encourages or motivates you).
- She has worked in this post for a period of four years. (meaning: unbroken).
- Because of the many problems in the NHS, nurses is very difficult. (meaning: keeping staff).



Fig. 17 People do not work happily on low pay.

Exercise 1f

Here is a summary of what you have just read. The articles (a, an, the, some) have been left out. Complete the summary, putting a word into each space (if necessary):

..... nurses are finding it difficult working in NHS hospitals wards are overcrowded and understaffed. There is problem with recruitment and training and, in order to adequately staff wards, many hospitals have to use agency nurses, which means not only do they have to pay more, but standard of patient care is lowered.

Pay: the facts

In April 2002, nurses' salaries in the UK were increased. Compared with nurses in some other countries, nurses in the UK may seem well paid. However, to get a fair picture you need to compare the figures with the UK cost of living.

Read the following information about the rates of pay and, with that information, complete the table that follows it. Amounts of money are written in words; when you complete the table, use numbers.

Exercise 1g

Nurses' salaries are on scales in nine grades. The salaries rise in the grades according to experience and length of service. Salaries also vary depending on qualifications and medical specialism.

Unqualified auxiliary nurses are on three grades. The bottom of the scale in Grade A is nine thousand seven hundred and thirty-five pounds per annum (p.a.) and the top of the scale of the highest unqualified grade is sixteen thousand and five pounds p.a. The top salary on Grade B is thirteen thousand four hundred and eighty-five pounds.

When fully qualified staff nurses on Grade D reach the top of the scale they can expect to get seventeen thousand six hundred and seventy pounds. If they move up a grade to E the maximum pay increases to twenty thousand six hundred and fifty-five pounds.

The bottom of the Junior Sister pay scale (Grade F) is eighteen thousand nine hundred and seventy pounds, which is less than the highest paid Senior Staff nurses who earn twenty thousand six hundred and fifty-five pounds.

Grade G rises from twenty two thousand three hundred and eighty-five pounds to twenty six thousand three hundred and forty pounds. The top salaries of specialist nurses on Grade H are twenty nine thousand nine hundred and ninety pounds. Senior nurses can earn thirty-one thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds p.a. and the least they will earn is twenty-seven thousand six hundred and ninety-five pounds.

Unqualified nurse

Grade A

.....- £12 220

Unqualified nurse

Grade B

£11 455 -

Unqualified nurse

Grade C

£13 040 -

Staff Nurse

Grade D

£16 005 -

Senior Staff Nurse

Grade E

£17 105 -

Junior Sister

Grade F

..... - £24 565

Ward Manager

Grade G

£22 385 -.....

Nurse with specialist role

Grade H

£25 005 -.....

Senior Nurse

Grade I

.....-.....

Exercise 1h

Which of the following statements are true?

- A nurse's salary increases the more experience the nurse has.
- A nurse's salary decreases the higher up the grade the nurse is.
- A nurse's salary is on three grades.
- A nurse on Grade D is at the top of the scale.
- Nurses on Grade D are paid £16005.

- f. A nurse on grade D gets no more than £17 670.
- g. The lowest paid Junior Sisters receive as much as the highest paid Senior Staff Nurses.
- h. The lowest paid Junior Sisters get more than the highest paid Senior Staff Nurses.
- i. Grade A nurses are at the bottom of the scale.
- j. Grade A nurses are at the foot of the table.
- k. Grade A nurses are paid on two scales.

Answers and comments on the language

Exercise 1a

- 1** The best choice is **b**. The writer is angry that nurses don't do anything about their working conditions. Option **a** is not the best choice because you can accept a bad situation but still 'mind' it. To 'live with' a bad situation (option **c**) is to accept it without liking it.
- 2** The best choice is **b**. Although nurses are asked to do 'impossible' things, these are not 'amazing' things (option **a**) which are more likely to be things like miracles, magic tricks or walking on water. It is possible to succeed at doing 'impossible' things when the word is used in this exaggerated way (option **c**).
- 3** The best choice is **c**. The writer means that the mistakes we make are understandable because anyone who is asked to do impossible things would make the same mistakes, so he is saying it is not the nurses' fault.
- 4** The best choice is **a**. Something that 'counts' is something that is important. To 'fool yourself' is to persuade yourself that something is true when it is not.
- 5** The best choice is **c**. When the bank manager asks 'where is the money coming from?' he is exclaiming that the writer (of the letter) simply does not have enough money.
- 6** The best choice is **c**. A 'disservice' is the opposite of a favour (or a service) and doing 'no favours' for somebody often means doing a disservice rather than doing nothing.



Fig. 1.8 Overdraft! Don't make me laugh!

Exercise 1b

- 1** **b**. Nurses have to try to do impossible things.
- 2** **c**. The writer's patients have a variety of fractures.
- 3** **a**. The writer thinks we have fooled ourselves for too long.
- 4** **c**. His bank won't let him overdraw any further.
- 5** **a**. In the past, obedience in nurses was a virtue.

Exercise 1c

Many nurses in the UK say that the profession is held back by pay and status. They say that the NHS is still conservative minded, that they are still subordinate to doctors and that their professional judgement does not get enough respect.

They say that, though Florence Nightingale's heart was in the right place, she has helped to keep an outdated image of the profession. They say that it is time to get rid of the Florence Nightingale image and that nurses' pay should reflect the importance of the work they do.

Exercise 1d

- 1 b. The text tells us that there are fewer beds partly because of the nurse shortage – which means that this is only one reason but that there are others.
- 2 c. To 'back up' has a number of different uses in English. For example, it can mean 'to reverse'. 'To back out' can mean to 'change your mind' as in option **b**.
- 3 a. When does a weekend start? Friday night? Saturday morning? The prepositions 'since', 'over' and 'until' are important here. Option **b** is true but not the best choice.
- 4 c. The important thing is who is 'who' in the sentence – staff or patients? Option **a** might be right if the sentence read: 'Hospital staff have to decide who gets ready for surgery'. Option **b** doesn't tell us that some patients will not get to surgery – it only considers the order they will be in. Option **c** means to decide who is most important from a surgical point of view.
- 5 b. Normally, a person who is a 'would-be' something wants to become something. The story called 'The Man Who Would Be King' is about a man who wants to be a king. In the text, 'would-be nurses' are people who are thinking about becoming nurses.

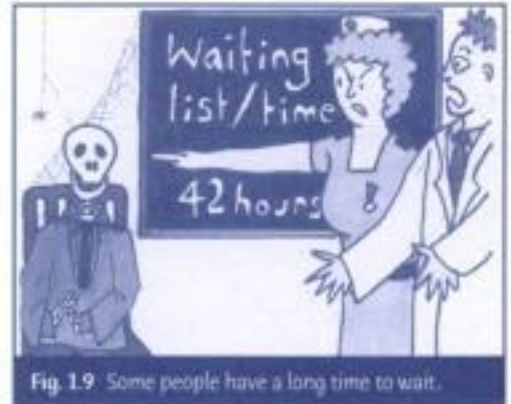


Fig. 1.9 Some people have a long time to wait.



Fig. 1.10 The nurse who would be queen.

Exercise 1e

- b. She had no idea about how to do the job and was sacked for being incompetent. Note that you make 'competent' into a negative by adding the prefix 'in-'.
- c. Low pay is never a good incentive to work hard.
- d. She has worked in this post for a continuous period of four years.
- e. Because of the many problems in the NHS, retaining nurses is very difficult.

Exercise 1f

Some (or no article) nurses are finding it difficult working in no article NHS hospitals. The (or no article) wards are overcrowded and understaffed. There is a problem with recruitment and training and, in order to adequately staff the (or no article) wards, many hospitals have to use no article agency nurses, which means that not only do they have to pay more, but the standard of patient care is lowered.



Exercise 1g

Unqualified nurse
Grade A
£9735–£12 220

Unqualified nurse
Grade B
£11 455–£13 485

Nurse
Grade C
£13 040–£16 005

Staff Nurse
Grade D
£16 005–£17 670

Senior Staff Nurse
Grade E
£17 105–£20 655

Junior Sister
Grade F
£18 970–£24 565

Ward Manager
Grade G
£22 385–£26 340

Nurse with specialist role
Grade H
£25 005–£29 990

Senior Nurse
Grade I
£27 695–£31 830

Exercise 1h

- is true. Note the structure of the sentence – X happens the more Y happens. For example: 'the risk of cancer increases the more someone smokes.'
- is not true.
- is not true. There are nine grades.
- is not true. There is a scale in each grade so it is possible for a nurse on Grade D to be at the top of the scale in Grade D but not automatically. Most nurses aren't.
- is not true. Some nurses (not all) on Grade D are paid £16 005.
- is true. £17 670 is the top of the scale.
- is not true.
- is not true.
- is not true. They are at the bottom of the table.
- is true. The 'bottom' of the table and the 'foot' of the table are the same place.
- is not true. Note the differences between 'scale', 'grade' and 'table'. Here, the 'table' is divided into 'grades' and there is a 'scale' in each 'grade'.