The day England’s Chief Nurse shadowed me

It’s not every day your boss asks to accompany you on a client visit, but this is exactly what happened to health visitor and Queen’s Nurse Pamela Shaw recently.

The day came about when I acted upon a request made by England’s Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) Jane Cummings at last summer’s Queen’s Nurse Institute (QNI) Award ceremony, to shadow some Queen’s Nurses in a clinical setting. The initial arrangement was for her to meet the student health visitors at one of the monthly support meetings and then observe a home visit to showcase the breadth of the practice educator/health visitor (HV) role as a Queen’s Nurse in ensuring students receive high quality training in the clinical setting as well as demonstrating how health visitors address the needs of clients within their homes. However, Jane’s busy work schedule meant the shadowing was reduced to less than half a day.

A revised tight schedule was drawn up which outlined the time of Jane’s arrival, her meeting with senior managers, photo shoots, departure from the meet/greet, arrival time at the clients home, the time spent with the client and return journey to the train station. I also ensured that senior managers, the communication department and the client were also made aware of the plan and consent was gained from all to participate.

The big day finally arrived when, on 5 March 2015, Jane arrived at Pinderfields Education Centre [Wakefield, mid-Yorkshire] and was greeted by several Queen’s Nurses, as well as people from the senior management team. Following a brief discussion and photographs, Jane and I set off for the clinical shadowing experience.

Certainly it provided a great opportunity to exchange information on the benefits of the health visiting implementation plan. We discussed the six high impact areas and how HVs are utilising innovative practice to contribute to health outcomes and shaping services for the future. We also discussed the key role of HVs in the healthy child programme and how the increase in HV numbers has been central to help secure the transition going forward. Additionally we acknowledged the crucial work of Practice Educators and Community Practice Teachers in supporting students in practice.

I was also able to share with Jane the ideas that I have developed and implemented to support students and newly qualified HV, including:

- Monthly Student HV Support Groups – ensuring the development of a community of learning and enabling students to link theory with practice;
- Student Welcome Pack – the pack is a tool that enables the student to have a basic understanding of the structure of the organisation, share contact numbers and plan learning experiences;
- HV preceptorship pack - developed to ensure the smooth transition from student to newly qualified health visitor.

Jane and I agreed that the combination of Practice Educator, Community Practice Teacher input, the Student HV Support Groups and the tools highlighted above has enabled retention of students as we continue to respond to the ‘Call to Action’ on expanding the HV workforce.

At the home visit Jane was informed by Sarah, the client we visited, on the importance of the client and HV relationship and how having a good rapport can foster trust and ensure the care provided is based on her needs. Sarah added the support she received had been very positive and research-based and that a combination of open discussions, leaflets and directed to NHS Choices and other health websites, had enabled her to make informed decisions to promote the health and wellbeing of herself and her baby, Owen.

At the end of the visit Jane and I had further opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the profession, including providing quality support and ensuring HV teams remain motivated and focussed on the objectives of the six high impact areas.

I am pleased that Jane was able to give up some of her time to undertake the shadowing experience which enabled me to proudly showcase the work we do for local families and share some innovative ideas. I am very
grateful to Sarah and Owen who willingly gave up their
time to be part of this shadowing experience.

I hope that sharing my shadowing experience will inspire
others to do similar, and although they may not be
shadowed by England's chief nurse, they may be shadowed
by their own organisation's chief nurse. Shadowing
from a bottom up and top down approach in the NHS
encourages opportunities to showcase the impact of how
decisions made at strategic levels impact on service users
and providers. It also enables exploration of why decisions
were made, the justification for these decisions, challenges
encountered as well as how these were overcome.

Finally, I would encourage all nurses to continuously
seek out opportunities to help develop services
within and external to their organisations. This can
be achieved by volunteering or contributing to NHS
policies, joining health networks and associations.
There are many benefits such as enabling like-minded
people to develop and share ideas for improvements
to service and personal development. As a Queen's
Nurse I have contributed to conferences (both at home
and internationally), policy groups and benefited
from nominations for many nursing awards. Having
good networking skills and the courage to contribute
to health policies and conferences has also enabled
me to gain membership of Jane's BME CNO Advisory
Group, the group has a vital role in contributing to local
and national policies, health initiatives, consultation
documents and providing leadership at a national
level. Other benefits to contributing to networks,

includes building confidence, raising your profile and
promoting best practice as well as receiving support and
opportunities. I am very proud of what I have achieved
and I plan to help increase the numbers of Queen's
Nurses both in my own organisation and wider.

The Queen's Nurse Award (2014) is the latest accolade
Pamela has received. In 2013 she was named as
one of the Health Service Journal's top 50 Black and
Minority Ethnic (BME) Pioneers. Other awards include
Health Visitor of the Year in 2012 and a Mary Seacole
Nursing Development Award in 2010.