From the Editor

On-call: ready, steady, go!

With the anniversary of the NHS this month it gives us all the opportunity to reflect back to how things were across the decades. A chance to think about your own career and the contribution you have made to healthcare.

When I started working in theatres in the 1980s probably one of the most contentious aspects of the job was the shift patterns. The off duty that caused the most angst was the weekend on-call shift which lasted for 42hrs unbroken, from Friday at 14:00 through to Monday at 08:00. In the hospital where I worked the theatre staff were required to live in. No one was allowed to go home during those 42hrs, even if you lived locally. In those days those three nights away from home amounted to a take home salary of £30, ten pounds per night! Mind you by the time you deducted your Chinese, Indian and possibly pizza take away you were lucky if you had £5 left! To add salt to the wound these on-call hours were not included as part of your normal 37½ hr week, they were extra!

I am not quite sure when the light bulb moment occurred and hospital directors realised that this was perhaps an inhumane and slightly risk adverse procedure to have staff on-call for such a long period. I think we can thank the EU for this one and the implementation of working time directives. I am aware of a few smaller hospitals that have had to keep an operational system of on site on-call, but I hope that the service conditions of those faced in the 1980s in terms of continuous hours and salary have changed.

When I started work in ambulatory care in 2001 the evening and on-call shifts stopped and Monday – Friday regular hours became my new structured life. Gone was the adrenaline rush life with the sick feeling in my stomach, now I could live a more sedate ‘normal life’. No more bleep or phone calls at three in the morning or making sure that your clothes were positioned perfectly at the bedside ready for that quick change. No more reheated microwaved takeaway, cold pizza or lukewarm cups of tea (well almost, pizza the next day still has a certain pull especially after a night out).

This quiet sedate life didn’t last long though as I met and moved in with my partner who is a member of the fire and rescue service. So although I am now not the one jumping out of bed at all hours, I am the other person, the one who turns the light on and makes them promise to drive carefully as they charge out the door! So I still have to walk over perfectly positioned clothes every morning that are lying on the floor ready for that quick change and still reheat half eaten meals in the microwave.

The staff that work on-call rota in order to provide that seamless service and respond to the 24/7 emergency requests, in my opinion, are truly amazing. I applaud you all for your ability to adapt your life in order to deliver a service to people often in the direst of need.

Finally it is a year since the Grenfell Tower tragedy in West London. An event which is so locked in our memory it is fitting that this issue covers the unthinkable, a fire in theatre. Wilson and Farooq’s paper ‘Fire in operating theatres: DaSH-ing to the rescue’ is a must read for all theatre practitioners. What more proof do we need that the unthinkable does happen?

Karen McCutcheon
Editor
Email: editor@afpp.org.uk
Disclaimer  The views expressed in articles published by the Association for Perioperative Practice are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the policy, opinions or beliefs of AfPP.

Manuscripts submitted to the editor for consideration must be the original work of the author(s).

© 2017 The Association for Perioperative Practice
All legal and moral rights reserved.

The Association for Perioperative Practice
Daisy Ayris House
42 Freemans Way
Harrogate
HG3 1DH
United Kingdom

Email: hq@afpp.org.uk
Telephone: 01423 881300
Fax: 01423 880997
www.afpp.org.uk