Personal Reflection

When I was a newly qualified nurse in 1995, I worked in a regional neurosurgical unit, and Duty of Candour requirements and principles did not exist in the form that we know today.

One experience early in my career has stayed with me for more than 30 years and helps explain why openness, honesty and transparency have become such important principles in health and care. Looking back, it also helps illustrate why Duty of Candour matters, not just when certain notifiable safety incidents occur, but whenever people and families need truthful information to make informed decisions about their lives.

I looked after a gentleman who had been admitted from his local district general hospital for investigations. As part of my preceptorship programme as I had just qualified, I cared for him under the supervision of my mentor. He was very unwell with many symptoms and the patient and his family repeatedly sought answers about his condition but were not given the information they needed to understand what was happening or prepare for what lay ahead.

Although this example predates the introduction of Duty of Candour and did not involve a notifiable safety incident, it demonstrates why the principles that underpin Duty of Candour are so important. Today, Duty of Candour is a general duty to be open and transparent with people receiving care, and it recognises that patients and families have a right to truthful information, meaningful conversations, and an apology when they have suffered harm when things go wrong.

While my experience related to the communication of a diagnosis rather than a patient safety incident, it highlights the same principles of openness and transparency that now underpin Duty of Candour.

For me, this experience remains a powerful reminder that candour is about much more than compliance with a regulatory requirement or professional duty. It is about recognising people's right to know, enabling informed choices, maintaining trust and ensuring that patients and families are not left facing uncertainty when honest communication is needed most. This early experience helped shape my understanding of why Duty of Candour is such an important part of person-centred care and why it has continued to be relevant throughout my professional career.

Although this patient example is not one of Duty of Candour in the context of something that went wrong, it reflects the same principles. This example and personal experience taught me that being open with people is not simply a legal requirement; it is a fundamental aspect of person-centred care and one of the most important responsibilities we have as nurses and health care professionals. When patients are affected by incidents, they must be kept informed and receive clear, honest communication, including an explanation and an apology.