

Thank heavens I caught polio in the '50s.

If I had caught it today, I can't imagine the current NHS being able to cope! Today's superior graduate nurses wouldn't be able to cope with the high level of care we needed around the clock.

In the '50s, the NHS really was 'the envy of the world'. Every Friday my surgeon, J.I.P. Janes, would sweep down on his ward round, heading up a swarm of foreign medics come to observe (and pay) to learn from Stanmore National Orthopaedic Hospital. Today, the only NHS hospital where I come across overseas doctors here to learn from the NHS is the Royal Brompton Hospital.

Recently, I had a long stint in our local hospital, the 1,000-bed John Radcliffe. A dirty injection needle into my eye had made me blind. Looked after by trainee nurses from Oxford Brookes, I was interested to see how today's nurses performed. At the start, they impressed me with their competence taking my blood pressure - every four hours they would wheel in a machine and plug it in - all going very smoothly - then read off the figures produced.

Then things started to unravel, the readings suddenly went sky high and I was alarmed - the nurses hadn't a clue what this meant and weren't about to do anything to discover what these showed. Today's nurses aren't expected to be curious, and I began to understand how the lack of curiosity enables scandals like the Lucy Letby case, and many others, go undetected for so long.

Eventually, it was an Agency nurse who let the cat out of the bag; apparently, the Ward sister in charge of drugs had forgotten to order blood pressure tablets, and others on the ward had the same symptoms - but I was the only one who queried readings.

I remember the cheerful way the nurses at Stanmore coped with our problems, however basic. Catching another hospital bug this time I threw up all over the floor. My bell summoned a nurse, who gave a horrified scream and told me "You've dirtied the floor. I need to call a cleaner to clean it up". Had no-one told her nurses have to deal with life's basic problems, however gross?

Doctoring today is by remote control. The nurse takes a photo of you, sends it to the doctors, and back comes their diagnosis. This was taken to the limits when one Friday Dr. Joel (it's all First names in today's NHS) actually appeared in my room, saying he had come to take some blood tests. He wasn't much good and gave up, saying he would be back on Monday.

Monday produced a cheerful Dr. Leo, who popped in to give me the good news that my blood test results were fine and was rather put out when I queried his diagnosis. Off he disappeared, never to be seen again - this was the norm in my ward; ask a nurse a question, and off she would go to some distant hidey-hole lost forever.

|One does wonder why some nurses bother to go into the profession today. When I was admitted to the ward, I was delighted to be shown into a single room (being highly contagious had its benefits). I waited for the Ward Sister to come and 'welcome' me - but no one came. After a while, it became obvious that infection control training was sadly lacking in those supposedly looking after me, so I fumbled my way down the corridor to find Sister's office.

Once there, a voice identified itself as a Sister, so I started - only to be stopped by the voice saying "but I don't talk to patients".

Sadly, it seems doctoring by remote control is going to be the norm in today's NHS. Although warned by the Ophthalmology Dept. that I was allergic to Preservatives, backed up by me when

admitted (but who takes note of patients?) the dreaded Ward Sister in charge of drugs had ordered the cheaper version of the antibiotics prescribed for me. Yes, you've guessed it - full of preservatives. I wake up one morning with a face aflame and burning itching skin all over my body.

Nurse sends over a photo of some of the rash - but no doctor appears. Eventually back comes a message to say the photo showed my 'rash' was only a bruise! The Dermatology Dept. did send down some cream for me to use, which promptly got lost because Ward Sister didn't write this down in the drugs book.

So, I self-prescribed and got my brother to buy some La Roche Posay products, which did the trick. I have booked a follow-up appointment at Guys Hospital in London, via the NHS Patient Choice scheme. It will cost the NHS as I will also need hospital transport, but this might make the hospital look more carefully at its procedures. Oh for the days of the caring nurse - I was very lucky they were around when I was being treated for polio.

I am NOT having a go at the majority of today's nurses who look after me beautifully. Just moaning at the way nurse training is becoming dependent on 'remote control doctoring'.