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'Wednesday does not last forever...' by Sophie Johnston, 6 April 2017

The dreaded second year of the nursing degree, the notorious year of the mental breakdown. Well, better make that plural for me as I've already had countless! One of my lecturers perfectly described the second year as "being stuck on a Wednesday", which in my book means it's not party time yet!

The second year is like being stuck in limbo; we have come so far, yet we still have a long way to go. However, no matter how long away it feels the weekend always comes around. This has led me to think whether it is all in the mind. Do we find the second year bad only because we are told it is so and soon it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy? Is the second year as bad as previous students make out? I've spent the last few days pondering on these questions.

Whilst on placement, I am often told I am a very calming person - much to the surprise of a few people! I always make sure I am engaged with the patient and smiling because at the end of the day who wants a sad or grumpy nurse looking after them?

But the above questions have made me realise I have been pushing myself to the side and pretending to be OK sometimes when I'm not. I have begun to grasp that sometimes struggling with things doesn't make me a rubbish student. It is OK to find things hard; being a student nurse is tough, but I must always remember I am tougher.

After realising this, I started to think about how I treat my patients. Cummings (2012) devised the 6Cs of care, outlining the values nurses should display. I started to wonder why am I limiting their application only to my patients? Care, Compassion, Commitment, Communication, Courage and Competence can be applied not only to my nursing life but also my personal life. How can I fully care for a patient if I am not taking care of myself? So, now I have started, one step at a time, to take care of myself and my mental health.

Initially, when my tutor gave a lecture on mindfulness, allowing us 10 minutes of meditation, I was stubbornly against the idea. I was not convinced that it would be of any use. Reluctantly, I joined in. However, not only did I love it, but I learnt an important lesson: give everything a go with an open mind. Now as I write, I'm on day 46 of being a member of *Headspace*, a mindfulness meditation app and I'm currently reaping the benefits.

Mindfulness also has a place in nursing. It has made me calmer and able to handle stress in a productive way. Being aware of the present moment, focusing on what you are doing and how you are feeling is only going to benefit practice. It wasn't my intention to preach about mindfulness, but for anyone struggling - give it a go! It has already helped me and I'm truly grateful to the tutor who introduced me to it.

I guess the real message I want to get across is that Wednesday does not last forever. Maybe some Wednesdays feel longer than others but the weekend is never too far away. And whatever you're doing, look after yourself. So, for anyone struggling through the second year, recognise the steps you could take to be a better version of yourself. It is OK not to be OK, but do something about it and don't let it impact the care you deliver. There are no shortcuts, it takes time to be the amazing nurse you were meant to be.

Sophie Johnston is currently in her second year studying adult nursing at the University of Cumbria

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