

Consultations for
carers to share their
views with external
organisations

FOR

FALKIRK
CARERS

Stirling University Consultation with Dr Gwenne McIntosh Head of Health Science and Joanne McNaughton BSc Nursing Programme Director.

Held on 7th May 2026

at The Carers Centre, Falkirk

Joanne and Gwenne from the University of Stirling met with Carers to gather feedback on what constitutes excellent nursing care and how future nurses should be trained. The discussion covered key issues including the importance of listening to Carers, understanding patient limitations, recognizing when additional expertise is needed, and addressing the challenges of caring for people with dementia, disabilities and other complex needs. Participants shared experiences about both positive and negative interactions with nurses, highlighting concerns about staff attitudes, knowledge gaps, and the need for better training in areas like autism spectrum disorders and rare medical conditions. The conversation also touched on the balance between theory and practice with suggestions for real-world Carer experiences into student education through mock shifts or detailed questionnaires about daily caring responsibilities.

Next steps

- Joanne: Draft a mission statement for the new BSc nursing program based on input from this meeting and circulate to attendees and group for comments and co-creation.
- Joanne: Invite interested Carers to join a reference/working group to influence the ongoing development of the new nursing program, including participation in validation committees and co-creation of learning outcomes.
- Joanne: Organize and schedule further meetings/events (e.g., "audience with young Carers", "audience with Carers of people with dementia", etc.) to allow students to learn directly from Carers and those with lived experience, as part of the curriculum development and delivery.
- Joanne/Gwenne: Consider and develop creative practice experiences (e.g., "day in the life of a Carer" scenarios, case studies, or mock shifts) for students, incorporating Carer and patient experiences into assessments and teaching materials.
- Joanne: Share the draft mission statement and timeline for program development with the Carer group for ongoing input and feedback (already provided to Carers who attended).

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Sharlene announced upcoming consultations, including one on May 14th about living with dementia and another on May 21st with Laura Wilson from the Scottish Government about flu, COVID, and RSV vaccines.

Joanne led a discussion about reviewing nursing education programs to ensure they meet contemporary healthcare needs. She emphasized the importance of incorporating the lived experiences of patients and Carers into the curriculum, highlighting four key stakeholder groups: academics, practice partners, students, and people with lived experience. The discussion focused on identifying qualities of excellent nursing care, with participants emphasizing the critical importance of being listened to and the need for nurses to recognize when they lack specific skills and need to call in experts.

Joanne explained the current training approach for mentors, including e-learning requirements and the role of practice education facilitators, while noting that University of Stirling students receive at least one full placement in dementia/older adult care. The discussion also touched on the need for additional training around autism and learning disabilities, as these patient groups are increasing and require specialized care approaches.

Joanne and Gwenne emphasized the need to create a culture that encourages questioning and learning among staff, suggesting that motivated professionals can drive improvements in patient care.

Gwenne discussed the importance of teaching students about the role of Carers, effective listening skills, and compassionate communication. A Carer suggested that students could visit a Carer for a day to see how hard it can be caring for your loved one. Discussion led to the possibilities of creating mock shifts or detailed case studies to help students understand the realities of caring roles. The conversation also touched on the complexities of caring responsibilities and the need for nurses to recognize the multi-faceted nature of carers' roles. There was conversation about the importance of taking time to chat to Carers.

Gwenne also noted that NHS Forth Valley has shown positive changes in leadership over the past 18 months to 2 years, which she hopes will help improve the nursing program and attract more students to the field.

Gwenne shared insights from her research on male Carers, highlighting that men tend to prefer practical support over emotional assistance and often neglect their own health while caring for

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others. Joanne and others contributed by noting that senior men are reluctant to ask for help due to concerns about competence, emphasizing the need for intuitive and compassionate care from nurses. Joanne spoke about the importance of people being treated as individuals and supported to have their needs met.

Joanne finished by announcing plans to introduce a new nursing program in September 2027, with the first graduates expected in 2030. She emphasized the importance of active listening in healthcare interactions and outlined plans to develop a mission statement for the program using feedback from Carers. Joanne invited participants to join a reference group to influence nursing education and offered ongoing opportunities for involvement in the program's development and future evolution. If you are interested, please reach out to Sharlene.

Carers experiences and comments

- A Carer spoke about caring for family members with disabilities, including challenges with feeding tubes and care home costs.
- A Carer shared challenging experiences with hospital care, including difficulties with hoisting and tube feeding, while also noting positive recent experiences where nurses acknowledged their limitations and sought appropriate support.
- A Carer discussed challenges in nursing care, particularly regarding dementia patients and newly qualified nurses. This Carer stated that sometimes younger nurses struggle to identify patients' limitations and properly communicate with families.
- A Carer discussed the challenges of identifying when autistic individuals are masking, highlighting the importance of nurses recognizing these signs during brief interactions. She emphasized the need for better training on neurodiversity and autism in nursing programs, as well as the importance of involving Carers in patient care when consent is given.
- A Carer highlighting the importance of individualized care and awareness of rare syndromes beyond autism.
- A Carer suggested that it might be good to have students doing a placement in a Carers home or visiting a care home when the Carer is visiting their loved one.
- A Carer suggested gathering information about Carers' daily experiences through questionnaires or daily/weekly journals, this information could then be used for student training purposes.
- A Carer shared a personal story about her cared for persons admittance to hospital, personal belongings were lost, this Carer highlighted the importance of staff response and communication, this Carer felt dismissed when she was told "yes this happens all the time", with no offer to look for the lost property.

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- A Carer discussed challenges in hospital care, lack of time for staff to support at mealtimes and the additional pressure put on Carers to go in to support at mealtimes.
- A Carer spoke about the food choices at hospital and lack of fresh vegetables.
- When asked what makes excellent nurses a Carer commented “someone who listens to us, we know the person best”.
- A Carer commented that pathways take too long to come into place within hospital settings.
- A Carer commented that “Alzheimer’s nurses and Falkirk community occupational therapists have been great and really listened”.
- A Carer commented that sometimes nursing staff can give information to a patient that can’t retain information, this Carer wishes that nurses would tell the person but also the Carer when someone lacks the ability to retain important information.
- A Carer spoke about the need to try and simplify/streamline paperwork for staff and Carers, this Carer spoke about another Carer having to create their own excel spreadsheet of medications as they couldn’t understand the hospital issued one.
- A Carer commented that there are not enough nurses on the wards.
- A Carer asked who “mentors the students’ mentors”, Joanne explained that they are supported by a very small team of staff, this Carer asked how many are in the staff team and Joanne explained that there are 5 staff who cover the Forth Valley area.
- A Carer emphasised the need for staff to include them when there cared for person has provided consent, this Carer feels there are “too many barriers and some of these barriers don’t need to be there”.
- A Carer spoke about the need for nursing staff to be aware of Attention, Deficit, Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).
- A Carer spoke about Functional, Neurological, Disorder (FND) and the stigma that is often associated with this condition.
- A Carer spoke about the importance of having Power of Attorney in place, another Carer commented that guardianship is equally important.
- A Carer spoke about the need for nursing staff to be mindful that the Carer may have had no sleep for days and may be dealing with very challenging behaviours at home, therefore they might come across as short, but they are just exhausted.
- A Carer commented that some nurses might be great with the paperwork and terrible with people. Gwenne explained that students need to pass both the practical and paperwork side of the course.
- Many Carers in the room spoke about the drip down effect, if the managers at the top have poor practice this drips down the chain of command, there was emphasis on the need to ensure mentors are the best people to do the job.
- A Carer said that new students need to “treat people the way that they would like to be treated”.

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- A Carer spoke about the “my name is.....” guidance, this Carer feels that this is a good initiative, however feels that money could be spent better, this Carer feels that senior management within the hospital teams need to spend more time learning from the staff on the floor “they know where the money needs to go”, many Carers in the room agreed with this comment.
- A Carer spoke about an older male family member not wanting to seek support due to worrying that they would be deemed incompetent, this Carer felt additional pressure to support them and the cared for person, other Carers commented that “the older generation are less likely to ask for help”. A male Carer in the room commented that “I just got on with it and ended up in the hospital myself”.
- A Carer spoke about being at crisis point before a package of care was implemented, this support came too late and the cared for person no longer lives at home with the Carer.
- A Carer said that their social worker has been great and said to call if they need additional help or support.
- A Carer spoke about supports being reduced when people are seen to be managing better, a Carer commented that “you are managing better because you have the support, when they take it away again you go back to struggling”, other Carers in the room agreed with this comment.