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NEWSLETTER · IN CONVERSATION WITH HELEN PALK

Give patients time, not tick boxes

Helen Palk — nurse of nearly thirty years — on the grandmother who set her on the path, the vanishing art of bedside nursing, and why proper care can't be reduced to a checklist.

Helen Palk's vocation was shaped long before she reached a ward, by a grandmother who nursed injured troops in the Second World War and a childhood surrounded by strong, compassionate women in healthcare. She came to nursing the long way — pharmacy counter, pharmacy technician, healthcare assistant — before qualifying as a registered general nurse and later a midwife, and has spent nearly thirty years as a GP lead nurse in the South East. I'm lucky to call her a friend.



It's not about tick boxes. It's about giving patients time.

— Helen Palk, on Pharma Prescribed

Old-school nursing

Helen's mission sounds almost quaint until you feel its force: bring back old-fashioned bedside nursing. The matrons she learned about from her family, the proper patient care, the talking, the time. She's clear-eyed that the

modern NHS has drifted toward the checklist, and equally clear that something essential is lost when care becomes a form to complete rather than a person to attend to.

The long way in

Her route in is a quiet argument for valuing every rung. Weekends behind the pharmacy counter, qualifying as a technician, then a healthcare assistant role on a rural Sussex ward that opened her eyes — each step earned, none skipped. In the 1990s a training place as an RGN was genuinely hard to come by; she got there by wanting it, and by the encouragement of colleagues who saw it in her.

Train them as we were trained

Her plea for the next generation is simple: train new nurses the way she was trained, with time at the bedside and the fundamentals taken seriously. From urology to theatre recovery to midwifery to general practice, her whole career draws on the same core — that nursing is, at bottom, about being present for people. It's not corny. It's the job.



Listen to the full episode

Helen Palk on Pharma Prescribed — at pharmaprescribed.com and wherever you get your podcasts.

Helen Palk is a general-practice lead nurse in the South East of the UK, with nearly thirty years' service spanning general nursing and midwifery.