Trust asks NMC to change language threshold for overseas recruits

By Petra Kendall-Raynor

An NHS trust has written to the Nursing and Midwifery Council asking the regulator to lower its English language test pass mark so it can recruit more nurses from overseas.

East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust has a 13.5% nursing vacancy rate and wants to recruit more nurses from the Philippines. Its executive director of workforce and organisation development Thomas Simons wrote to the nurse regulator outlining problems with recruitment and over-reliance on agency staff.

All non-EU trained applicants to the NMC register must pass the international English language testing system (IELTS) before submitting their application.

The test assesses candidates on reading, writing and oral skills and must achieve a score of at least seven out of a possible nine overall.

In his letter to the regulator, Mr Simons, who decided to sit the test himself, said: ‘While supportive of the imperative to ensure all qualified nurses recruited from overseas meet standards set through the IELTS test, the pass mark set is restricting the supply of international nurses who could be joining the NHS and making a positive impact on patient care and the overall financial challenge nationally for the NHS.’

Untapped talent

He added that 140 nurses in the Philippines were waiting to join the trust, and could already be working for it if the pass mark was set at 6.5.

Mr Simons suggested the NMC could allow non-EU trained nurses to register with a pass mark of 6.5 and that employees could be supported to raise their score to the required seven within a set period. He also suggested requiring recruits to pass at the visa requirement for IELTS (4.0) and adding a profession-specific language test administered by the NMC.

RCN steward at East and North Herts, Anne Wells said: ‘Potential recruits who would be able to communicate effectively and practise safely may be missing out because they can’t quite get the score required. The IELTS test has many sections that are not relevant to the subjects nurses cover on a daily basis.’

Recruitment agencies from India and the Philippines expressed concerns to Nursing Standard last year about being unable to send nurses to the UK because of the IELTS pass mark required.

NMC chief executive Jackie Smith said setting the IELTS at level seven provided the regulator with assurance that nurses applying to join from overseas have the right level of English to work in the UK.

She added: ‘We are mindful of the staffing pressures in the health service and we are looking at how we can be flexible with the way our language requirements are met, while retaining the IELTS level.

‘Any changes we may make in the future will be evidence-based, and will not undermine public protection.’

PHOTOGRAPHERS CAPTURE THE RICH LANDSCAPE OF NURSING IN 2016

The RCN is inviting members of the public to choose the photograph they think defines nursing in the 21st century.

The college’s centenary Care on Camera competition received more than 800 entries. Judges, including BBC newsreader Huw Edwards, shortlisted 50 images, and the public can vote for a winner in the £500 people’s choice category.

The shortlist includes images that capture a nurse putting on protective equipment to treat patients with Ebola, a critical care nurse supporting someone with spinal cord injury, an older hospital patient playing his violin to nursing staff and a paediatric district nurse trudging down a muddy path to visit a patient.

All the winners will be announced at RCN congress in June.

The shortlisted images will feature in an exhibition that will tour schools, libraries and hospitals around the UK.

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