Rallying cry: hundreds of nurses and midwives travelled to London last month to convince the government that it needs to take the NHS deficits crisis seriously. Addressing a rally organised by the RCN at Westminster Central Hall, college general secretary Beverly Malone said: ‘It is time to work together to tackle the deficits crisis.’ But, according to NHS Employers, reports of major job losses are ‘misleading’ and few people are being made redundant. Deputy director Sian Thomas said: ‘We feel it is important to set the record straight because of the likely damage to staff morale and public confidence of persistent inaccuracies and speculation.’ An NHS Employers briefing is available at www.nhsemployers.org/workforce/workforce-1011.cfm

The number of hospital beds has fallen by a third in the past 20 years, yet the NHS does more work than ever before, according to the NHS Confederation.

A report launched last month, argues that, because of advances in technology and new ways of treating patients, fewer hospital beds are needed.

According to Why We Need Fewer Hospital Beds, the number of NHS beds has been reduced from 211,617 in 1984 to 145,218 in 2004.

NHS Confederation chief executive Gill Morgan said: ‘More patients are being treated faster and more effectively than ever before by the NHS. The number of actual beds has steadily reduced, yet the amount of care the service is able to deliver has dramatically increased.’

Mixed reaction from senior nurses to plans for new PCTs

by Nick Lipley

Senior nurses have given a mixed reaction to the long awaited Department of Health announcement last month on the future configuration of primary care organisations.

According to the announcement by health secretary Patricia Hewitt, the number of primary care trusts (PCTs) in England will be cut from 303 to 152.

For many nurses, it marks an end to the speculation that has beset the NHS since the publication of Commissioning a Patient-Led NHS last summer.

But there are also worries about how they will survive in an NHS in which the number of PCTs has been halved.

Speaking after a meeting last month of the RCN nurses in executive and strategic roles forum, chair Wendy Jehan said: ‘We welcome the clarity and an end to the uncertainty.’

But she raised concerns about the ‘pooling arrangements’ for selecting the nurses who will lead the new, larger organisations.

Ms Jehan said: ‘We want to see the human resources arrangements for all affected nurses and staff carried out properly. We want to see equity in this, particularly for senior nurses.

‘We must also avoid situations where, to avoid job losses and redundancy packages, senior nurses find themselves in roles for which they are not suited and thus potentially at risk of performance management issues.’

RCN head of policy development and implementation Howard Catton questioned ministerial expectations that, over the next two years, the new PCTs would realise ‘annual savings of £250 million to plough back into front line services’.

‘We want to see the human resources arrangements for all affected nurses and staff carried out properly. We want to see equity in this, particularly for senior nurses’

He said: ‘It’s difficult to stack up how this change can save money quickly unless there’s an assumption that a lot of provision will be by others and that the NHS will concentrate almost exclusively on commissioning.’

Mr Catton added: ‘The NHS has a pretty impressive track record in many areas of service provision.’

Announcing the plans, Ms Hewitt said: ‘I have spent a great deal of time considering local views and concerns about the reconfiguration and have not been afraid to respond to these concerns in my final decision.

‘These changes make it clear that there is not a blueprint for PCTs across the country. The final decisions reflect a range of views and will deliver the best for patients in all parts of the country.’

The new PCTs will be established from October 1. For details, access www.dh.gov.uk/NewsHome/NewsArticle/is/en?CONTENT_ID=4135088&chk=JufTo