Government to respond to proposed reductions in recruitment of non-European healthcare staff

by Christian Duffin and Nick Lipley

The Home Office is due this month to respond to proposals on changing the ease with which healthcare organisations can recruit nurses from outside Europe.

The proposals were published last month by the government-commissioned Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).

According to the MAC recommendations, recruiters will be able to employ band 7 and 8 nurses from outside the European Economic Area to work in operating theatres and critical care units, although recruits will have to pass a test in English.

These types of nurses are considered to be in short supply and are included on the MAC’s ‘shortage occupation list’.

Under the new immigration points system, applications by other nurses will be considered less favourably.

The MAC list also suggests that there is a shortage of senior nurses in ‘elderly units’ in Scotland, but there is no mention of other care sector nurses on the list.

The RCN argues however that all nurses, especially those working in the care sector, should be on the shortage list.

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General secretary Peter Carter said: ‘The proposals fails to take into account the disproportionate impact on the care home sector, which has become heavily reliant on overseas nurses and care workers.’

The college argues that the plans could also hit hospitals, because older people may have to remain in them if there are no places for them in the care home sector.

The proposals by MAC make up part of what the Home Office is calling ‘the biggest shake-up of the immigration system in 45 years’ to ensure that ‘only the best can work in Britain’.

The college is also urging members of the European parliament (MEPs) to change the law so that it is illegal for nurses to work more than 48 hours a week.

Dr Carter has written to the MEP committee on employment and social affairs regarding proposals to change the European Working Time Directive.

Employment ministers from member states of the European Union want workers to continue to be able to opt out of a maximum 48-hour working week, and agree to a maximum 60-hour week, or to 65 hours if they are on-call only.

The college wants the phasing out of the clause that allows this opt-out of the 48-hour maximum weekly working time.

Dr Carter said the law as it stands suggests that a 60-hour or 65-hour week is ‘acceptable’.

Almost half the UK’s nursing workforce in the NHS is employed on a part-time or casual basis, according to figures published in Nursing Standard last month.

Analysis of the latest workforce figures for the UK shows that 44 per cent of nurses and support staff are employed on part-time contracts. If those on casual or ‘bank’ contracts are included, the proportion rises to 49 per cent.

Fighting infection: a nurse has become one of the first clinical matrons in the country to be given the sole duty of leading a team of cleaners in the fight against infection.

Kathryn Patrick, pictured far right with, on the near right, domestic assistant Khadijah Mohammed, will liaise with clinicians and patients at North Bristol NHS Trust to find out how to improve cleaning services.

Ms Patrick, who will be given the opportunity to work some nursing shifts to keep up with her professional development, will lead a domestic service team of around 400 cleaners with two managers, who will help with technical issues and the day-to-day control of staff.