PREPare for the next century

The latest information from the UKCC (1) concerning PREP indicates that by April 1, 2001, all practitioners will be obliged to comply with its requirements, whatever their individual circumstances. For managers with nursing backgrounds, this will generally mean demonstrating that they have developed their knowledge, skills and understanding in the field of management. However, although this will satisfy the needs of PREP and maintain an effective registration, will it be of any long-term value to the nurse manager concerned?

This will largely depend on the type of management development he or she engages in. Although management development means different things to different people (2), it is generally associated with training courses aimed at improving the participants’ managerial effectiveness, the assumption being that, as a consequence, this will raise organisational performance.

Examples of this approach are still evident in the development of nurse managers, where the focus is on the acquisition of specific skills and qualifications (3). But it is likely that the future organisation of healthcare will require managers who have taken a somewhat different path in their development. Henderson and McMillan (4) suggest that conventional management training and development may have limited potential for achieving extensive organisational culture change. If this is true, we will need to examine how the process can be improved to equip future nurse managers with the skills and knowledge needed both to meet the criteria for mandatory professional updating and maintain their essential contribution to healthcare.

In the business world, the MBA was once seen as the key to success for managers. Recently, however, concern has been expressed about its suitability for today's business climate (5). Rather than discipline-specific facts and skills, managers need people skills, fresh thinking, the ability to deal with change and to realise that in today’s interdependent and complex world there are no certainties to cling to. Also, it was noted as far back as 1987 that Britain had yet to find the most appropriate form of management education to ensure its future prosperity (6). This situation is reflected in healthcare. The establishment of new organisational structures and the shifting of power among commissioning agencies, providers and GP fundholders has rendered much nurse management development of limited value (7).

There is also evidence to suggest that people in senior management positions in the NHS still lack the ability to work effectively together in a mixed management setting (8). Indeed, recent events in healthcare organisations demonstrate that this is a major difficulty. Votes of no confidence in NHS trust chairs and resignations at board level display a lack of understanding and poor communication among personnel in senior management posts (9).

The potential for such problems is likely to increase as new organisational configurations and new ways of working emerge in response to the demands of the health and social care market. James (10) asks what kind of organisation might be expected to service communities and assist them in achieving their own image of a healthy community. She maintains that the seeds of these new organisations are already growing, and that forward-looking agencies are now beginning to take account of the network of social obligations and
responsibilities that underpins transactions in the new healthcare market and which determines how we decide to do business and who we conduct business with.

She calls these organisations of the future 'network organisations', and says: 'The network organisation is not housed in one place, with one set of staff and one budget, but is simply a place where things get done. It is like a project group in that it may be life-limited and outcome-focused, but it is more than a project group in that it is self-accountable and there to implement rather than to plan.'

In order to work in these network organisations, nurse managers will have to develop a range of skills, many of which traditional forms of management development do not deliver. Thomson (11) identifies a management agenda that public sector organisations must consider if they are to succeed in the future. It contains four key tasks:

- Perceiving the changed circumstances and formulating the organisation's response to them: developing a vision
- Communicating the vision to the organisation, to stakeholders and to customers
- Listening to the organisation and finding out what people are saying: finding out what the 'blockers' are which prevent them achieving the vision
- Removing the blockers to empower the people and to ensure congruence between what actually happens in the organisation.

The crucial element to all these tasks is the ability to communicate effectively with a large group of people across a range of organisations. The wide-ranging communication that characterises managerial work is achieved through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks.

The wide-ranging communication that characterises managerial work is achieved through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks. Mintzberg (12) studied managers at work and likened them to the neck of an hour glass, located between the top and the base of the organisational hierarchy, through networks.

The report also advocates that managers should deliberately seek situations that challenge and provide access to support and to other people's perspectives through, for example, active-learning networks.

There is also an apparent need to forge links with the private and voluntary sectors, especially in view of the emergence of a mixed economy of care with a need for a clear commitment on the part of the managers' sponsoring organisations. This approach would involve taking a great deal of trust, in that there may be few tangible outcomes in the shape of certificates or competencies.

However, the potential that such a model would have for increasing understanding and communication between and within organisations is vast. Baker (18) has called for the establishment of a management development forum for the NHS. If such a forum is to be established, the views of nurse managers should be considered. Handy (19) observes that tomorrow's organisations cannot be run on yesterday's assumptions. The implications that this has for nurse managers, in terms of management development, demand a fresh approach.

References
1. UKCC. What PFGP will mean for you? UKCC Register. 1994. 15. 4-5.
2. South R. Management development within the National Health Service. Senior Nurse. 1988. 2. 11-12.