Ambiguity over future of staff from EU ‘completely unfair’

RCN calls on government to develop sustainable workforce strategy

By Stephanie Jones-Berry @RCNi_Steph

The NHS would not cope without its growing cohort of nurses from the European Union (EU), says the RCN.

The number of EU nationals joining NHS hospitals has soared in recent years. Around one in five nurses recruited in England in 2015-16 were from the EU – up from one in 14 in 2011-12, according to NHS Digital.

RCN director of nursing, policy and practice Professor Dame Donna Kinnair said nurses trained outside the UK have contributed to the NHS since its inception.

‘The health service would not cope without their contribution, and with the future supply of nurses looking uncertain this situation will not change any time soon,’ said Professor Kinnair.

‘Allowing the ambiguity about the future of healthcare staff from the EU to continue is completely unfair.’

Professor Kinnair called on the government to develop a coherent and sustainable workforce strategy that recognised the critical role of overseas nurses.

Of the 33,000 nurses recorded as joining hospitals in the past year, more than 6,000 were from elsewhere in the EU: 1,750 were Spanish, 1,300 Italian and almost 1,000 were Portuguese.

Over the same period the proportion of nurses joining hospitals who were British dropped from roughly 78% to 70%.

In March, an RCNi analysis of overseas nurses revealed numbers of nurses from outside the European Economic Area have fallen – from 15,000 a year in the early 2000s to just 665 in 2014-15.

The rights of EU citizens to continue to work in the UK will be one of the key issues in the Brexit negotiations.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘We want to see the outstanding work of nurses who are already trained overseas continue, but at the same time we are delivering our plan to train more home-grown nurses.’

NHS Employers chief executive Danny Mortimer said his organisation is among those lobbying government to grant indefinite leave to remain for the 144,000 people from the EU working in health and social care.

Enter the RCNi Nurse Awards 2017

Nurse managers and those in leadership roles are invited to enter the RCNi Nurse Awards 2017 – the UK nursing profession’s highest accolade for excellence.

The awards showcase the dedication, creativity and passion of nurses in providing high-quality patient care across the health service.

The Leadership Award category is open to NHS or independent sector nurses who have developed initiatives to ensure their nursing ward or unit offers the highest quality and safest care possible.

This year’s category winner, Virgin Care Surrey senior district nurse and practice teacher Tracy Harman, developed training tools to offer nurses at her organisation more leadership training.

Nurses, midwives and health visitors – as well as assistant practitioners, healthcare assistants and nursing students – will all have opportunities to enter awards in 13 categories. These include the Andrew Parker Student Nurse Award, Innovations in your Specialty, Leadership Award, Patient’s Choice Award – sponsored by Yakult and the RCN Healthcare Assistant Award – sponsored by the RCN.

Other nursing leaders recognised by judges this year in the leadership category included Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust lead nurse Victoria Throne who was shortlisted.

She helped set up a new holistic service to ensure cancer patients have better access to palliative care.

An overall Nurse of the Year award will be chosen by the judges from the winners.

Nurses can either nominate themselves, their team or be nominated by a colleague.

To enter go to www.nurseawards.co.uk

To enter go to www.nurseawards.co.uk