Axed jobs but new uniforms ‘dishonest’

By Kate Williams

STAFF NURSES at an Isle of Wight hospital are being forced to wear ‘pseudo-sister’ uniforms following complaints from patients that it was impossible to identify the most senior nurse on the ward, nurses claimed last week.

Nurses at St Mary’s Hospital, Newport, used to wear similar coloured uniforms with their grades distinguished by different colour belts. Clinical ward managers wore traditional navy blue ‘sister’ uniforms.

But in November last year 18 senior nursing posts – grades G, H and I – were axed, the ward managers were offered managerial posts or redundancies, and eight F grade ‘junior sister’ nursing posts were created.

Now, to match their new title and make them look ‘different’, the F grades have been given navy blue and white striped uniforms, said Sandra Berridge, a Unison convenor and nursing auxiliary at the hospital.

‘If a patient asks to speak to a sister we just go and get the ‘junior sister’ because she is clinically in charge of the ward,’ she said. ‘When patients see navy blue they see what they believe to be the most senior nurse – the public don’t know any better,’ Ms Berridge said.

Unison officer Jim Hoggart said it was ‘highly disreputable’ for the trust to axe so many experienced nurses and pretend to provide the same service with lower grade staff.

‘It’s basically dishonest, puts added pressure on an already short-staffed workforce and leads people into a false sense of security,’ he said.

RCN officer Sue Donne said more than 400 years of experience had been lost in the exercise. ‘If you take away a ward figurehead it will have a knock-on effect and lower grade nurses will be providing the care they are not qualified to do.’

One of the nurses made redundant, Melanie Hersey, said: The trust has pushed clinical sisters into clipboard posts. They are putting less experienced people into the jobs and paying them less.’

Sue Barber, the trust’s director of quality, nursing and midwifery, said she did not wish to comment on the matter.

HVA celebrates 100 years of promoting health in the community

HEALTH VISITORS, nurses and political leaders helped the Health Visitors’ Association (HVA) launch its centenary celebrations last week.

Joined at the launch by shadow health secretary Harriet Harman and junior health minister Baroness Cumberlege, HVA director Margaret Buttigieg said: ‘100 years of the HVA is positive proof of the success of our organisation.’

Established in 1896, the HVA was the first nurses’ union and first women’s trade union to become affiliated to the Trade Union Congress in 1924.

‘We represent a most respected profession, whose forward thinking commitment to the community has served to improve the nation’s health for generations. The strides we have made in public health in the last century are in no small part due to front-line health visitors promoting good health to well people,’ she added.

Nurses not consulted over privatisation

NURSING UNIONS are furious that the Grampian Health Board will not be formally consulting any nurses or union representatives before it decides which private contractor will be responsible for nursing services at the new Stonehaven Hospital.

Unison’s Ken McMillan said a committee of business managers, accountants, management consultants and lawyers would save money for the government, but at the expense of nurses and patients.

Royal College of Nursing officer Gordon Wenham said he was ‘horrified’ nurses were not being consulted, which he said was a fundamental requirement.

A health board spokesperson said no one on the sub-committee had a nursing background, but professional advice would be taken ‘as and when required’ from nursing representatives and the professions allied to medicine.

Both Unison and the RCN will be writing to Grampian Health Board about the issue. See News Analysis p16

Readers vote against degree status

NURSING STANDARD readers have voted seven to one in a phone-poll against making nursing an all-graduate profession.

RCN student nursing adviser Roz Osborne said she was not surprised by the result. An obvious reason was the problem of poverty among nursing students on the diploma course, she said. ‘The question to ask is how an all-graduate profession can enhance patient care,’ Ms Osborne added.