IN BRIEF

- Jenni Reed, the RCN Association of Nursing Students' sabbatical officer, has been elected to the executive of the National Union of Students. The two organisations are working more closely together now more nurses are trained in universities.

- The world's largest study of asthma, which will try to find out if earlier treatment can affect the development of the condition, was launched last week. The study, known as START (Inhaled Steroid Treatment As Regular Therapy in Early Asthma), will involve 6,800 newly diagnosed sufferers in 34 countries being given steroidal treatment. It will take five years to complete.

- The UK Central Council is looking for examples of innovation from nurses, midwives and health visitors to show how the principles of the Scope of Professional Practice are being used to the benefit of patients since its publication four years ago. The examples will be published at a later date. For further information write to the UKCC, 23 Portland Place, London W1N 3AF.

- Louise Clark from the Oxford Radcliffe hospital has won the 1996 RCN society of orthopaedic nursing award, sponsored by Smith+Nephew. She wins an all expenses paid trip to the US National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses annual congress in Dallas in June.

FURY AS OLDER WOMEN TOLD TO VISIT GPS FOR CONTRACEPTIVE SERVICES

Family planning clinics scrapped for over 25s

By Kate Williams

NURSES IN Solihull are furious after the regional health authority scrapped family planning clinic services for women over 25 and menopause clinics.

Women who use such clinics will be told to see their GP in a move set to save Solihull health authority £53,000 a year.

'It's dreadful,' said family planning nurse Huguette Jablonski. 'We don't know if our jobs are safe and it's very worrying for the women who have been visiting the family planning clinic for 20 years and don't want to see their GP about contraception.'

She said stopping the menopause clinics was 'very wrong' because many GPs still have not had specific training in the menopause or its treatment.

MS Jablonski added: 'They have destroyed an inexpensive, efficient service with no idea of how to replace it. The GPs are not prepared for this.'

Solihull Community Health Council also expressed concern. 'We feel this action is short sighted, sexist and ageist, excluding older women from an essential service,' said CHC chair Susan Bahner. 'Of the 40 GP surgeries in the borough, 35 per cent have only male doctors, less than half have a nurse trained in family planning and only one in four have clinics after 6.30pm,' she added.

Muriel Holroyd, chair of the RCN family planning nurses forum, condemned the decision, saying women would be disadvantaged in areas where the GP service is not comprehensive.

A spokesperson for Solihull Healthcare trust, which provided the services, said older women's needs were not being ignored: 'They can go to any GP who suits their needs.'

Cancer rise concerns all

A DRAMATIC rise in cancer cases on Benbecula in the Western Isles should concern all nurses in Scotland, the RCN has said.

Lis Cook, the RCN's community nursing and education officer in Scotland, said: 'Nurses in the Western Isles and the Northern Isles have been concerned about the increased incidence of gut and oesophageal cancers for the last few years.'

Concern follows Benbecula GP Francis Tierney's claim that the rise is linked to radioactive fallout from Chernobyl.

But Margaret Watts, director of strategic planning for the Western Isles Health Board, said: 'We're looking at very small numbers and at the moment we don't have any particular cause for concern.'

The Scottish Office is compiling a report on the matter.

Unions slam private finance

PLANS FOR privately financed hospitals in Norwich and Swindon are another step towards the privatisation of the NHS, nursing unions have warned.

The RCN said the initiative could lead to different terms and conditions for nurses working in the same hospital. Unison said the government's Private Finance Initiative would reduce patient choice.