Testing twins: A party for around 500 pairs of female twins was thrown by St Thomas’ hospital, London, last week to thank them for taking part in a major research study. The Twin Research programme was set up four years ago to study which age-related diseases, including osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, are genetically related.

UNIONS EXPRESS ALARM AT CREATION OF DOCTORS’ ASSISTANT POSTS

Fear new posts mean threat to patient care

By Kate Williams

Alarm from nursing unions has greeted the appointment of ‘doctor’s assistants’ at Peterborough Hospitals trust. The unions claim the assistants have little experience and minimal training but are performing some clinical tasks.

These include cannulation, male catheterisation and venepuncture, as well as taking a patient’s medical history, RCN officer Karen Charman said.

The assistants are being paid a similar salary to a ward clerk, which Ms Charman said suggested their training and education had not been extensive.

‘Task training is not like clinical training and does not give the necessary background knowledge of a nurse,’ she said.

The RCN is seeking a meeting with trust managers to discuss concerns. RCN adviser in nursing practice, Susan Scott, said that although the initiative would free up doctors from repetitive and routine procedures, it could lead to fragmented patient care.

Unison’s professional officer, Paul Chapman called on nurses to alert managers and the IJKCC if they believe delegation to ‘doctor’s assistants’ represented a threat to patient care.

The job description states the tasks to be performed will not be undertaken until training and education have been received and the individual assessed as competent.

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Final warnings are given to nurses following death in drugs mix-up

Two qualified nurses and a student nurse have been given final warnings after a patient died after being injected with potassium chloride instead of saline.

The incident, at Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil, has led to the withdrawal of potassium chloride from all wards except acute wards.

The student picked the wrong drug as both were stored in identical boxes. The doctor and qualified nurses failed to check. Nursing director Sue Elworthy said throughout Wales potassium chloride, saline and water were kept in similar boxes.

‘The doctor didn’t check the drugs. It is the responsibility of the trained nurses and the doctors, not a learner,’ she said.

Hospital staff have been told to re-read the trust’s booklet on the administration of drugs, which is based on the UKCC code of practice.

Cancer care insensitive, says report

HEALTH professionals are failing cancer patients, according to a new report from the National Cancer Alliance.

‘There needs to be a willingness to see you as a person, and maybe even a thinking person, rather than an object with a lump.’

The report, based on the views of 75 patients who took part in 12 focus groups, says that patients want more information and understanding from health professionals.

Patients said many health professionals were reluctant to use the word ‘cancer’ and had attitudes that bordered on the callous at the diagnosis stage.

Barbara Dicks, chair of the RCN cancer nursing society, said the report pointed to the need to ensure that nurses were involved at the point of diagnosis. Services should be structured so that patients had access to clinical nurse specialists, because medical staff had neither the time nor the background to give them the information they needed.

Patient-Centred Cancer Services: What Patients Say, is available from the National Cancer Alliance, PO Box 579, Oxford OX4 1LB. Price £10.