Elder abuse deserves much higher profile

By Dina Leifer

ABUSE OF older people should have as high a profile as issues such as child abuse or HIV and AIDS, a group of professionals is to tell the Scottish Office.

Representatives of the Royal College of Nursing, Action on Elder Abuse, the British Association of Social Workers of Scotland and Age Concern Scotland have compiled an action plan on elder abuse to be sent to ministers for home affairs and health, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.

The plan urges the government to give proper recognition to the problem. It also calls for better education about elder abuse for the public, carers and professionals, particularly GPs.

The plan was drawn up at a conference on elder abuse, organised by the four organisations, in Stirling last week. Margaret Pullin of the RCN said they were hoping for a positive response to the action plan from Lord Douglas-Hamilton.

The plan focused on GPs because they were uniquely placed to help, Ms Pullin said. 'The GP is one person elderly people relate to and hold in esteem. They can detect abuse and they have the power to do something about it.'

She added the government was guilty of 'financial abuse' of older people by charging them for their health care.

The conference also heard calls for better communication between agencies and a carer's testimony of how much having day care for her elderly mother had improved her life.

School report

SCHOOL NURSES feel they are failing to tackle children's mental health and substance abuse problems because they lack staff and resources.

But a Health Visitors Association survey found school nurses are generally happy in their work and believe their jobs are secure, despite recent cuts in services.

The survey, School Nursing: Here Today For Tomorrow, involved interviews with 1,000 health visitors.

Unions condemn threat against right to strike

GOVERNMENT PLANS to consider ways of making it harder for NHS workers to take strike action have been condemned by nursing unions.

One of the proposals is that a union which called a strike would have to compensate the trust for any costs it incurred.

A Unison spokesperson said: 'It is a very serious threat to the rights of working people.'

The Health Visitors' Association said it would oppose any move to prevent strikes, but did not expect such proposals to become a reality.

An RCN spokesperson said: 'The RCN is examining carefully the debate on "new unionism". We are examining all the issues being raised, and we are likely to be coming out with a full briefing later in the year.'

Chair's Land Rover sparks union outcry

NURSING UNIONS this week launched a furious attack on the NHS Executive Northern and Yorkshire office for giving its non-executive chair, John Greetham, a Land Rover Discovery worth £25,000.

Mr Greetham, who lives in a remote village on the North Yorkshire moors, took delivery of the lease car in April.

He said the reason for needing such a car was that he had to cover the health authority's 10,000 square miles and he had to negotiate the 90-mile journey to and from its headquarters in Durham in difficult weather conditions.

'This is the most cost effective and best way for me to do my job,' he said. 'If I went to Durham by train, it would often take me five hours just to get there.'

But Mr Greetham's explanation was dismissed by the RCN's regional officer Marion Pearson, who said she had covered exactly the same area for the last ten years. 'I've never been snowed in and I don't have a Land Rover Discovery,' she said.

'Most people get themselves to work under their own steam, either by car or public transport. There are plenty of people who live out in the sticks who still get to work without the need for a Land Rover Discovery.'

Edna Mulhearn, spokesperson for Unison, agreed: 'Some of my members who are struggling on £108 a week live in rural areas but they still have to meet their own travelling expenses.

'This man chooses to live where he does and if he needs a Land Rover Discovery he should buy one himself. People pay taxes expecting patient care, not special perks for the chairman.'