NHS Executive promises action to keep nurses

The NHS Executive has promised action in a bid to stem the flow of nurses leaving the profession as part of its Opportunity 2000 programme, which aims to get more women into senior positions.

The announcement came as the NHSE claimed it had achieved many of the goals set for the programme in 1991. It said 77 per cent of nurse executive directors are female and women are taking less time to reach senior nurse level posts.

Announcing the figures, Ken Jarrold, the NHSE’s head of personnel, promised action to make the health service more family friendly.

IN BRIEF

- RCN general secretary Christine Hancock was last week elected president of the standing committee of nurses of the European Community (PCN). Set up in the 1970s to represent the nursing voice in Europe, PCN comprises the national nursing organisations from European Union member states.

- Nurse Myrna Greenidge, has been awarded £600,000 agreed compensation by Barking, Havering and Brentwood health authority after suffering irreparable brain damage during a minor operation to remove a benign lump from her chest. The deal ended a damages claim on behalf of Ms Greenidge, who is in a chronic vegetative state.

- Health secretary Stephen Dorrell last week called for clinicians to be fully involved in health authority purchasing decisions, to ensure that advances in clinical practice, effectiveness and research were rapidly reflected in patient care. The RCN welcomed the statement but regretted that Mr Dorrell had made no specific mention of nurses, whose experience would be invaluable in purchasing decisions.

Children receive drugs they need faster with nurse-led prescribing

By Rosemary Rogers

A nurse-led prescribing scheme in a children’s hospital has resulted in children receiving the drugs they need more promptly and greatly reduced nurses’ reliance on verbal prescriptions from medical staff.

Speaking at the RCN paediatric nursing society’s Birthday Conference, Helene Smith, head of nursing at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Sick Children, Brighton, described the nurse-led drug administration scheme based on a medical and a surgical ward. The scheme has been extended this year to the nurse-led paediatric asthma clinic.

RSCNs of grade F and above may prescribe from a limited formulary, which includes paracetamol, lactulose, EMLA cream, Diprobase cream, Diflaim oral spray, heparin flush and 0.9% sodium chloride flush. The nurses are all required to go through a training day, including a mathematics test.

An audit showed that the number of children who received drugs at the time the need was identified rose from 44 per cent to 79 per cent. The number of medications given on verbal prescription fell from 72 per cent to less than 10 per cent, Ms Smith said.

And the quality of prescriptions improved markedly, with the doses of EMLA cream and 0.9% sodium chloride specified more accurately. Only one signature was illegible.

Describing how the scheme was extended to the asthma clinic, Edwina Wooler, an asthma clinical nurse specialist, said nurses were allowed to prescribe inhaled and nebulised medications. Oral prednisolone was also added to the formulary, but may only be prescribed by paediatric respiratory care sisters.

Currently nurses are only allowed to prescribe drugs in one of eight community pilot sites, but nurses in the Brighton scheme are covered under the 1968 Medicines Act. Legal restrictions require that the scheme cannot be called nurse prescribing and all nurses are taking less time to remove a benign lump from her chest.

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Fight to begin for nurses’ jobs at troubled Scottish trust

The RCN has vowed to fight ‘tooth and nail’ for nurses’ jobs at the troubled Highland Communities trust, where chief executive St John Hattersley resigned last week.

RCN officer Gordon Wenham said over half the 3,000 staff had signed a petition expressing no confidence in Mr Hattersley. Others would have signed but were concerned for their future.

Mr Wenham blamed staff discontent on a ‘management cock-up’ over a £3 to 4 million deficit. They felt if nurses had made a mistake of that proportion, they would have been disciplined or dismissed, he said.

Staff also resented a proposed recovery package, which includes redundancies. They have said care levels will not be reduced. You cannot maintain the care level and make something in the region of 30 nurses redundant,’ Mr Wenham said.

The trust declined to make any comment.

Telemedicine: computer link ups give health professionals the chance to consult specialists via the information superhighway. The technology was demonstrated at a conference in London last week.