Nurse shortage worst for ten years

AN RCN survey has uncovered further evidence of a serious shortage of registered nurses in the NHS.

The College has drawn up a list of nearly 70 trusts across the UK which have high vacancy rates, based on information from regional officers and representatives. The findings appear to confirm fears that the health service is facing its worst shortfall of registered nurses for a decade.

Among the trusts mentioned are Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals Trust, which is reported to have 40 empty posts out of around 800, Leeds General Infirmary with around 100 vacancies and South Ayr Trust with 84.

Wellhouse NHS Trust in London has appealed locally for nurses to work at Barnet and Edgware hospitals in temporary posts which agencies have been unable to fill. Like other trusts, Wellhouse has found its nursing shortage exacerbated by the recent flu epidemic.

'There is no doubt this is the worst shortage of nurses for at least ten years,' said RCN general secretary Christine Hancock.

'There is no slack in the system and severe shortages combined with the pressure of staff sickness makes it much more serious than we have ever seen before,' she said.

IN BRIEF

- A Scottish health board is working jointly with its local social work department to end bed blocking. Greater Glasgow Health Board is to transfer £4.46 million to Glasgow City Council to restart nursing home admissions. The board has also agreed to spend £400,000 on speeding up discharges into the community.

- Joan Thompson, a nursing officer with the Department of Health and Social Security in Northern Ireland until 1996, was awarded the OBE in the New Year's Honours list.

- The UKCC has produced a leaflet on its role and functions as nursing's regulatory body, This Is The UKCC lists details of the council's key services, main tasks and structure. Aimed largely at nursing staff and students, employers and consumer organisations, the leaflet is being sent to new registrants, trusts and colleges. Copies are available from the UKCC distribution department, 23 Portland Place, London W1N 4JT.

- One in four A&E departments have no measures to protect employees from violence, according to a recent survey. The findings, published by security screen manufacturers Safetell Ltd, show a rise in assaults on public sector workers. Employers show a lack of knowledge of their obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974), according to the company.