UKCC will deal with incompetent practice

By Kate Williams

NURSES WHOSE competence is 'just above acceptable levels' continue to practise because there are no mechanisms in place to measure or deal with the problem, a UKCC seminar heard last week.

Incompetent practice is an 'undiagnosed, potential epidemic' and the UKCC does not have procedures to deal with it, said Mandie Lavin, UKCC director of professional conduct, after the discussion seminar.

Nursing unions, professional organisations and employers took part in the debate.

Themes discussed at the seminar included lack of insight into incompetence, practitioners not cooperating on support and retraining and short term improvements in incompetent practice.

The UKCC has considered 47 cases of incompetence since 1993, but the figures are misleading because many cases go unreported, said Ms Lavin. 'Further action is planned. We may end up with changes to our legislation,' she said.

It is the employer's role to support practitioners, not the UKCC's, she said. 'If we struck off every nurse who had made a drug error we wouldn't have many left on the register,' Ms Lavin added.

Unison's professional officer Paul Chapman said: 'No one wants incompetent practitioners on the register but that does not mean the UKCC should have the power to strike them off.'

Mr Chapman called for further research into the scale of the problem, and further consultation.

An RCN spokesperson said: 'Managers must realise that it's far more cost effective to offer proper support to a nurse who is not performing adequately rather than letting his or her career end in a UKCC disciplinary hearing and possible dismissal.'

Sue Botes, Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association professional officer welcomed the discussion. But she was disappointed that it had not recognised the lack of nursing management.

Incompetence will be discussed as part of the review of nursing's regulatory bodies announced last week, and at the UKCC's June meeting.

Midwives raise concern over forced Caesareans

FORCED CAESAREAN sections will be the focus of the main debate at the annual conference of the Royal College of Midwives in May.

More than four out of five RCM branches have voted to make the issue the leading debate because they fear enforced Caesareans place midwives in a compromising position.

The selected motion calls for guidelines to protect their professional integrity.

RCM midwifery liaison manager Catherine McCormick said: 'Women in labour are perfectly capable of making decisions about their care based on full and accurate information. Midwives cannot stand by passively when a woman is being forced into a course of action she may not actually want.'

Ms McCormick said the large increase in enforced Caesareans in the past ten years was 'more to do with litigation than women exercising choice'.

She doubted that many women wanted to have unnecessary major surgery, which carried associated risks of infections, respiratory problems or thrombosis.

Grant for shift work study

A £71,000 grant to study how shift workers can reduce their risk of heart disease has been made by the British Heart Foundation to a research team at Surrey University.

Foundation medical director Brian Pentecost said there was evidence that shift workers, such as nurses and the police, had a higher rate of heart disease and sleep and gastrointestinal problems than the general population.

The research team will use real shift workers and simulated shifts to investigate whether changes to diet and exposure to bright light can help people adapt to night work.