Helping hand: Terry Wogan launched a charter for children with arthritis last week, aided by some young people with the condition. The charter is available from Arthritis Care. Tel: 0171 916 1500

First redundancy for NHS health visitor

By Kate Williams

A HEALTH VISITOR in Bath is the first of the profession to have been made compulsorily redundant by the NHS, nursing unions claimed last week.

Kathy Merle was employed by Bath and West Community NHS Trust for 12 years. But she received a letter on Good Friday informing her that from April 1 she no longer had a job.

The RCN and the Community Practitioners’ and Health Visitors’ Association have condemned the decision and are in dispute with the trust.

Mary Daly, CPHVA professional officer, said: ‘This is a massive abuse of power and no one has looked at the health needs of the local community. Those who should be challenging the trust and GPs seem unwilling to do so.’

The CPHVA has been increasingly concerned about the way some GP fundholders appear to be reducing community nursing services.

Ms Merle was unable to make provision for the families or children at risk who make up her caseload. The practice now believes it can function with one health visitor and possibly other less qualified staff, regional officer Lucy Anderson added.

RCN south west officer Helen Hancox said: ‘This decision will affect all health visitors in Bath. The population hasn’t changed to warrant a different skill mix. This highlights the fact that the trust will do anything it can to keep the contract with the GPs.’

A trust spokesperson denied the redundancy was a cost-cutting measure. ‘The GPs and the trust decided the practice population no longer needed two G-grade health visitors. We are saddened to hear that the unions want to pursue a campaign to retain staff regardless of the population’s needs.’

Government breaks drugs promise

THE GOVERNMENT has failed to reassure nurses that they will be protected if they administer and supply drugs under protocol. The RCN south west officer Helen Hancox said: ‘This decision will affect all health visitors in Bath. The population hasn’t changed to warrant a different skill mix. This highlights the fact that the trust will do anything it can to keep the contract with the GPs.’

A trust spokesperson denied the redundancy was a cost-cutting measure. ‘The GPs and the trust decided the practice population no longer needed two G-grade health visitors. We are saddened to hear that the unions want to pursue a campaign to retain staff regardless of the population’s needs.’

IN BRIEF

- The first major health conference following the general election will be the RCN Congress in Harrogate from May 19-23. Congress theme will be ‘First principles’. Among the issues under discussion will be pharmaceutical companies running parts of the NHS and whether registered nurses will be replaced by multiskilled care workers.

- The Saudi lawyers representing Lucille McLauchlan and Deborah Parry, the two British nurses charged with killing an Australian colleague in Saudi Arabia, sent a 17-page clemency plea to the brother of murdered nurse Yvonne Gilford. The brother has rejected the plea and asked that the law be allowed to take its course.