IN BRIEF

- Nursing unions met this week to ratify their joint evidence to the nurses' pay review body (RB) for 1998. The evidence, submitted in the name of staff side, will follow tradition and not include a claim for a specific percentage pay increase. But it will point out the rises required to bring nurses' pay into line with that of comparable professions.

- Nurses at an east London hospital were all thanked for their year's work, and then only a third of them each given a £175 bonus by way of recognition. Managers at Chase Farm hospital paid the bonus to staff who have transferred to trust contracts, a move called 'divisive' by the RCN.

- Huge shortages of nurses in psychiatry, paediatrics and A&E departments in London have been uncovered by a King's Fund review of the capital's health services. Chaired by Lord Hussey, the think tank team said many professionals reported 'burnout' caused by overwork and stress. Their report, Transforming Health in London, calls for teams of inspectors, similar to those sent in to assess schools, to be used in the hospitals.

- Hospitals are ill-prepared to deal with major incidents, according to new research. A study of the incident response plans of 150 UK hospitals in the journal Pre-Hospital Immediate Care said plans frequently failed to specify the staff required or deployed them inappropriately.

Hands on care: nursing student Roger Weetch was the dummy used by nurses, paramedics and members of the emergency services when they practised their response to road traffic accidents last week. The exercise took place at West Yorkshire fire brigade's headquarters near Bradford

EALING HOSPITAL MODEL IS BASED ON COMPETENCIES AND COULD REPLACE CLINICAL GRADING

Cautious welcome for new grading system

By Buzz Stokes

A NEW system of grading nurses based on their competencies, which could replace clinical grading, has received a guarded welcome from the RCN.

The system, being piloted at Ealing Hospital NHS trust and now known as the Ealing Model, was developed by ward staff and management in consultation with nursing unions.

Under the scheme, nurses are placed in two broad categories - nurse clinician and general/staff nurse. These two categories are then broken down into three levels, foundation, interim and senior.

Newly qualified nurses would join the scheme at the bottom of the clinical ladder, which they would climb as they acquired new skills and competencies.

Nurses are profiled and a development programme is agreed to help them achieve the competencies that they need to progress. Pay is also related to these three stages and progression to the next level is automatic once a nurse is deemed competent. Similar models have been developed in the United States and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) now known as the Ealing Model last week, said: 'Ealing may not be the answer, it may not be the model for all employers to follow, but in the context of national pay talks taking place next year and beyond, we think that the pilot here is asking the right questions and ought to be considered very seriously.'

Midwife 'suffered years of abuse'

A MIDWIFE told an industrial tribunal last week that she suffered years of racial abuse from her manager and that her complaints of discrimination went unheard.

Judith Nicholas won her case for unfair dismissal against Epsom Health Care NHS Trust last week, 15 months after she was sacked.

The Royal College of Midwives, which supported Ms Nicholas, is now seeking compensation, but the trust is considering an appeal.

The RCM said Ms Nicholas had struggled to find regular work since her dismissal, and had been forced to work on midwifery bank shifts.

Ms Nicholas told the tribunal she had suffered abuse for four years, including being publicly humiliated in front of clients and colleagues.

In its written judgement, the tribunal wrote: 'The subsequent dismissal of Ms Nicholas was the culmination of this pattern of abuse and bore no relation to her ability to carry out her duties.'

A trust spokesperson said Ms Nicholas had been dismissed because of the standard of her work. The manager accused of abusing her no longer worked for the trust, he added.