GUIDANCE URGES NURSES TO BE FULLY INVOLVED IN THE RUNNING OF PRIMARY CARE GROUPS

DoH boost for nursing lead in primary care

By Thelma Agnew

COMMUNITY NURSES' chances of leading primary care groups (PCGs) have been given a boost by new guidance to health authorities and trusts which insists on nurse involvement and warns that the groups must not be GP-dominated.

The health department guidance, due out this week, lays down rules for the formation of PCGs. It makes clear that community nurses must have a major role in the establishment, running and leadership of the groups. Health authorities will be required to take full account of the views of community nurses about who they want to represent them. Trusts will have to ensure frontline nursing staff, not just nurse managers, have the time to get involved.

In the run-up to the launch of the PCGs in April 1999, each community trust will name a lead nurse who will act as the point of contact between the trust and the shadow PCG.

'It is most important function of the groups – improving primary care – could also be led by community nurses,' said Mr Major, whose mother had asthma. 'PCGs provide new opportunities for nurses which I hope they will grab with both hands.'

RCN community health adviser Lynn Young praised the guidance for making it 'absolutely clear' that PCGs are not to be medically dominated.

'Some community nurses do feel enthusiastic about the new NHS and want to be involved,' she said.

Nurses in 'mufti' confuse elderly patients

ELDERLY PATIENTS are more likely to recognise mental health nurses wearing uniforms than those dressed in 'mufti', research has revealed.

Researchers tested the perceptions of patients with psychiatric illness. Out of 71 patients aged 65 to 94 years, 59 identified nurses in uniforms.

But just 36 did so when the nurses were dressed in ordinary clothes – even though these nurses were familiar to them.

Most of the patients (38) had 'functional' illnesses such as schizophrenia, with the remaining 33 being diagnosed with 'organic' disorders including Alzheimer's disease.

Publishing their findings in the Psychiatric Bulletin, the researchers believe the study raises questions about the appropriateness of informal clothes in carers of elderly people.

Hugh McCready, nurse researcher and Peter Bentham, a consultant in old age psychiatry at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital, say most mental health nurses wear informal clothes believing it improves nurse-patient relationships, however there is little evidence to support the trend.