COUNCIL MEMBERS WARN PUBLIC IS AT RISK WHILE NURSE SPECIALISTS WORK WITHOUT OFFICIAL STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

UKCC delays its decision on assessing specialist practice

By Nick Lipley and Adele Waters

THE UKCC's delay in finalising assessment procedures for specialist practice prompted frustration last week as Council members warned the public continued to be at risk.

Firm proposals on how the regulatory body will assess nurses' fitness for higher level practice will not emerge until the end of the year.

In the meantime, the public, employers and the profession remain confused about what constitutes specialist practice.

The UKCC plans to launch a UK-wide consultation exercise this summer. Nurses will be invited to give their opinions on how higher level practice should be assessed.

Valerie Morrison, Council member, said: 'It causes me concern that I cannot see the end in sight. We need a completion date in relation to this work. The public are at risk because we are deliberating and trying to seek perfection.'

Professor George Castledine, chair of the UKCC steering group on the issue, admitted that the Council may be outpaced by specialist nurses eager to establish their own guidelines.

'I would urge us to avoid a terrible situation happening where there are about 40 different specialist groups all setting their own standards,' he said.

Explaining the delay, Sarah Waller, UKCC director of standards promotion, told Nursing Standard: 'It's a difficult issue and very complex. Since the inception of specialised and advanced practice in 1994, health care has changed enormously.

'With such a variety in the level of practice and training of nurses, there is concern that there is no clear pathway. We need to develop robust systems to ensure safety of advanced practice.'

But Pippa Gough, RCN assistant director of policy and practice, said: 'I think it is a mess. It's terribly confused. Employers, stake-holders, nurses and the public want to know what is specialist practice. 'What is the difference between ordinary registered practice and specialist practice?' she asked. 'Until we can describe the difference in practice, the terms are not helpful. It's taking a long time,' she added.

But she also praised the UKCC for its consultation process. The Council had realised its initial policies on specialist practice had failed and was now working hard to get it right, she said.

No time for induction at women's prison

NURSES AT a north London women's prison are being 'left to sink or swim' because they do not receive a proper induction, it has been claimed.

According to a report by Sir David Ramsbotham, chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales, new staff at Holloway Prison are given insufficient support by managers.

The report, based on his inspection in December 1997, highlights nursing shortages so severe that staff were working up to 100 hours' overtime a month.

Sir David found nurses also faced so many administrative duties that they had little direct contact with inmates.

According to his report, understaffing had led to the 92-bed health centre failing to meet 'an NHS equivalent standard of care'.

However, Sir David applauded improvements in inmate health care made since his visit in 1995, when he declared the prison 'dead in the water'.

Since the inspection, six nurses have been recruited and all new employees now have a two-week induction, a prison spokesperson said.

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