UNIONS WELCOME PROSPECT OF MORE GOVERNMENT MONEY

£250 million extra to avert winter crisis

By Adele Waters

HEALTH UNIONS have welcomed the prospect of £250 million extra cash for the NHS.

Reports at the weekend suggested that the money would be given to the NHS to avert a winter crisis. Government sources confirmed the revenue would be raised by transferring money from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Christine Hancock, RCN general secretary, said: ‘This money is really significant. Of course, we would have liked more, but we need to make sure there is proper targeting and co-ordination to be certain there is a real benefit to the NHS this winter.’

Bob Abberley, Unison head of health, said: ‘This is a step in the right direction, but we will have to wait to see whether enough money is made available to deal with demands on the NHS.’

Mary Daly, professional officer at the Community Practitioners’ and Health Visitors’ Association, said: ‘We’re delighted, but we need to wait and see what happens. This government is working to the previous government’s agenda but Labour policies are slowly coming on stream. I think this will ease suffering this winter.’

The move follows concern at the British Medical Association’s suggestion that patients could be charged up to £80 per night for inpatient stays and up to £10 per GP visit if the government refused to pay up.

A spokesperson for the RCN said: ‘We wouldn’t want to see these proposals pursued. We must ensure all core services are free at the point of delivery.’

The BMA’s report, *Options for Funding Healthcare*, was published in the same week as a national survey showed most taxpayers would pay more taxes for the NHS.

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Unions cheer new charter plans

NURSING UNIONS have welcomed the government’s plans for an NHS Charter which will spell out patients’ responsibilities – as well as their rights.

They say the new standards, expected next July, will be an improvement on the existing Patient’s Charter, which is ‘not worth the paper it is written on’.

Announcing the new initiative last week, health secretary Frank Dobson said new standards will ask patients to keep appointments and treat nurses and other health workers with respect. However, the initiative would not specify penalties for persistent service abusers or those who assault staff, he said.

The RCN said the new charter was one for patients rather than professionals because it aimed to measure quality of care. Unison welcomed it as a ‘serious re-think of the Patient’s Charter, which is not worth the paper it is written on’, but said penalties needed to be looked at more closely because charter standards were not enforceable.

Roger Kline, professional officer for the Community Practitioners’ and Health Visitors’ Association said replacing the Patient’s Charter was a good idea, but satisfying staff and patients was a ‘difficult balance’ to get right.

Mr Kline said nurses could use many practical sanctions – such as refusing home visits for non-urgent cases – against offending patients.

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On the move

DAVID Dawes, who was the first Project 2000 student to chair the RCN Association of Nursing Students, has been appointed service commissioning manager for Manchester Health Authority. He previously worked as contracts manager for North Cheshire Health.

VERITY LEWIS has joined the labour relations department of the RCN as a research officer. Ms Lewis, a nurse, previously worked for the Law Society of England and Wales and the Policy Studies Institute.

LESLEY Davidson has been appointed director of the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit. Dr Davidson will take up her post on November 3. She succeeds Dr Judith Lumley, who left the unit in June 1996 to return to Australia.

PAT GRATTON, a nurse lecturer in healthcare studies at Bradford University, has been ordained as a deacon at her parish church in Shipley, Yorkshire, by the Bishop of Bradford. Ms Gratton will combine work as a non-stipendiary minister with her lecturing post.