WHITE PAPER ON QUALITY SHOULD ‘ALLOW NURSES TO TARGET PATIENT CARE’ SAYS CHIEF NURSE

Proposals for tighter scrutiny welcomed

By Thelma Agnew

ENGLAND’S chief nursing officer Yvonne Moores has claimed that the government’s White Paper on quality will allow nurses to concentrate on providing patient care.

As part of the drive to improve care, Ms Moores announced that by April 2000 all nurses will be appraised and will be expected to have personal development plans.

Under proposals launched by health secretary Frank Dobson last week as part of the NHS 50th anniversary celebrations, nurses, doctors and managers will have to submit to an unprecedented level of scrutiny.

Ms Moores said the move would allow nurses to target patient care more effectively. ‘It very much fits in with what nurses believe is important,’ she said.

For the first time, NHS boards will have a statutory duty to make sure standards are met. According to the White Paper, A First Class Service: Quality in the NHS, the Commission for Health Improvement will monitor performance in the NHS with a rolling programme of spot checks on trusts.

It will also have the power to recommend sending ‘hit squads’ made up of nurses, doctors and managers to underperforming trusts. It may also report individual staff directly to regulatory bodies, such as the UKCC.

Meanwhile, national service frameworks, based on the findings of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, will state which treatments should be provided for major conditions. There will be an annual survey of patients and carers.

Christine Hancock, RCN general secretary, welcomed the White Paper: ‘As a nurse I know that change in the NHS only works when we put patients first.’

However, Karen Caines, director of the Institute of Health Services Management, warned: ‘An “off with their heads” approach will just lead to defensiveness and resentment.’

New Year parties cancelled because of millennium bug

MOST NURSES and other health service staff will not be able to celebrate the millennium due to fears over the millennium bug, the RCN has warned.

The warning follows urgent Audit Commission advice last month that all trusts draw up contingency plans.

Staff in acute and community trusts are being told they will have to be on duty or on call in case vital equipment fails. They may also have to be available to deal with possible air and rail disasters.

According to Anne Casey, RCN adviser on information issues, some trusts are on target with contingency planning but many others have yet to decide what precautions to take.

Speaking at the NHS Confederation conference celebrating 50 years of the NHS, Ms Casey said that one of the biggest problems facing trusts was whether to rely on assurances that their equipment is safe.

Ms Casey said that some manufacturers are refusing to provide such assurances, raising fears that monitors, ventilators, laboratory analysers, syringe drivers, even lifts, could fail as the year 2000 begins.

Resources top of ‘wish list’

PROVISION OF adequate resources heads the ‘wish list’ of responses to the government’s consultation on its nursing strategy.

Consultation ends this week on the document, but early responses from the English national board and the RCN call for a commitment to provide sufficient resources to allow nurses, midwives and health visitors to fulfil their roles.

The RCN’s response says it is ‘dismayed’ at the lack of investment in health visiting and school nursing by health authorities and trusts.

It also calls for greater emphasis to be placed on developing leadership skills for nurses so ‘they can actively contribute to improving the health of populations within the new commissioning environment’.

Regulating healthcare assistants to help protect the public is proposed by the UKCC in its response. The UKCC also wants the model of independent practice developed by midwives to be applied to nursing and health visiting.

See Feature page 26

NEWS SUMMARY

■ Extra cash should stave off staged pay p6
■ Nurses ready to take on GPs’ work p7
■ American Nurses Association Congress p9