**In brief**

Nurses in Northern Ireland are being denied the chance to work for the advice line NHS Direct. The NI Department of Health and Social Services has admitted there are no plans to introduce the scheme and a rethink is unlikely until completion of studies of pilot schemes in England in December.

RCN NI board secretary Frances Donaghy said: 'If people in England, Wales and Scotland are soon to benefit from this service, people in Northern Ireland would certainly question why they are being denied access to expert nursing advice.'

A senior sister in charge of theatre recovery at the Hope Hospital in Greater Manchester has won a five figure sum in damages after a back injury ended her nursing career. Christine Henshall picked up the tribunal ailed that Dr Rai had unfairly dismissed as clinical damages after a back injury at the theatre recovery at the Hope Hospital in Greater Manchester last October.

The home owner, Suda Rai, claimed he was sacked because an elderly patient had gone missing while in his care. But the tribunal ruled Scott Kingswood disappeared 'vindictively' by circulating dismissal letters to local councils.

A senior nurse sacked from a nursing home after setting up a Unison branch has won more than £37,000 in compensation.

Last week, an employment tribunal ruled Dr Rai was unavailable for comment on the minimum service requirement comes into effect.

From June 1, employees can claim unfair dismissal if they have been employed for more than a year. Currently, a two-year rule applies.

The new law also increases the amount employees who have been unfairly dismissed may claim from £12,000 to £50,000.

---

**Staff side says unions and NHS managers have 'moved quicker than ever before'**

**Dobson blames unions for the delay in pay rises**

By Bill Doult and Nick Lipley

NURSING UNIONS have rejected government claims that they are to blame for delays in implementing this year's pay award. But the health secretary dismissed the allegations as 'one of the biggest exercises in barefaced cheek', even by House of Commons standards. Instead he turned on the unions for acting too slowly.

Staff side secretary Josie Irwin hit back, saying: 'This year, management and staff sides moved quicker than they ever had before. It's the first time I can remember an advance letter being available in April.'

Ms Irwin said this year's advance letter could have been sent to trusts even earlier had the government acted more quickly to provide details suggesting there would be a 10 per cent rise for all nurses.

She said it was 'pretty damn good' that the unions had acted as speedily as they had.

This year's nurse pay award has forced Altrincham General Hospital in Lancashire to bring forward proposals to close two post-acute rehabilitation wards for elderly patients, management claims.

Chief executive of Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust, John Sargent, said the proposals were due to be considered anyway as part of the hospital's modernisation programme, but had been lent greater urgency because of the pay award. He said there would be no redundancies.

---

**£150 for millennium night shift in London**

NURSES IN London have said they are 'bitterly disappointed' by the announcement they are to be offered £150 to work the New Year's Eve night shift this year.

The offer was agreed at a meeting of all the chief executives of health authorities and trusts that cover the capital. It will be paid in addition to normal unsocial hours rates.

Regional director of the NHS in London Nigel Crisp said: 'Staff will readily work over Christmas and the new year to make sure patients receive every care. But the extra efforts they will be making on the night, including missing out on the celebrations, should be recognised.'

RCN assistant general secretary Tom Bolger said: 'London nurses will be bitterly disappointed by this announcement. The payment compares very badly with areas outside London, where some nurses have been offered more than £300.'

He added that some agencies would be charging considerably higher rates for nursing staff.

'Last year some agencies were paying their nurses £38 an hour at Christmas, compared with the £38 extra paid to staff nurses for a seven and a half hour shift,' Mr Bolger said.

'Nurses could be working alongside agency nurses earning up to three times as much as them.'