In brief

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The report also found a growing concern about levels of violent behaviour on wards, including threatening language and behaviour, racial and sexual harassment and abuse of alcohol and drugs. But because of the shortage of skilled nurses, and reliance on temporary staff, the therapeutic element of care was suffering, often resulting in 'little more than custodial care'.

It also notes that well co-ordinated care at the point of discharge into the community is needed if treatment is to be successful, and that many units had 'easy and frequent contact' between hospital and community-based staff. However, in others, the format for recording care plans was badly designed and the content unclear, with patients and relatives uncertain about plans for their future care.

Junior doctors turn to nurses for help

Junior doctors need to rely on nurses for support in the first few months, but although it can mean a greater burden on nurses in the short term, it can be rewarding in the longer term as you build up a good rapport with a doctor and even have an input into their particular style of medicine,' she said.

But Liz Jenkins, RCN assistant general secretary, pointed out that the increased use of agency and temporary nursing staff meant it took junior doctors longer to get to know their colleagues. She also stressed that medical colleagues had a responsibility to give support.

Dr Simon Minkoff, a junior doctor from Manchester who has just completed his first year as a house officer, said: 'My advice to new doctors is to seek help when you need it. With the backing of a good medical team, your first year can be very rewarding.'

The BMA's junior doctors' committee is currently in negotiations with the government to improve the pay and conditions of junior doctors, and to find ways of enforcing the agreement on working hours.

Mental Health Act Commission highlights pressure on beds and increasing violence

Bed shortages are causing delays in psychiatric care

PSYCHIATRIC NURSES are facing problems caused by increased pressure on inpatient beds and are spending a disproportionate amount of time finding alternative placements, according to the Mental Health Act Commission.

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Gordon Lakes, acting chair of the commission, commented: 'In the period under review, the commission has visited many services that more than adequately achieve [the Act's objectives], but a significant number do not and some fail to provide even an acceptable level of service.'

Mental health charity Mind has welcomed the findings of the commission, which have highlighted some of its own concerns, including the inadequate numbers of qualified nurses on the wards, leading to the "increased use of coercive forms of restraint and control."

Mind chief executive Judi Clements said: 'Patients are entitled, as the commission's acting chair states, to a "safe, calm and therapeutic environment", yet this report shows hospitals are too often failing patients on all counts.'