Pay review must be fair

Linda Thomas

FLIP THE coin of last year's pay award and this is what you see. On one side, the coin reveals that a respectable hike in the minimum starting salary for registered nurses has played its part in improved recruitment levels. On the other side, the coin tells a different story. It must be pretty irritating to be an E grade staff nurse with a D grade colleague who earns more than you. Not surprisingly, staff side raises this anomaly in its evidence to the pay review body this year.

Staff side wants the pay review body to continue the process of improving recruitment, addressing retention and boosting motivation when it makes its recommendations. Rewarding experienced nurses at clinical level is an easy place to start. It shows respect for nurses who really do care about providing a quality service, but often struggle to do so because they are simply too few in number.

How many nurses do you know who have given up the unequal battle and opted for an easier life outside nursing? Quite a few, no doubt, and you probably envy them more than you blame them for getting out.

Nursing certainly does not get any easier as the years go by. Rising patient expectations, changing treatment regimes, increasing work intensity and the government's challenging agenda are all referred to by staff side. Is there any nurse, anywhere, who does not want to see a modern and dependable health service? Of course not. But the will needs to be given the wherewithal and that means reasonable recompense for nurses.

The pay review body surely cannot remain unmoved by the sheer logic of the evidence from staff side. Nor can it ignore the stern reminder from staff side that nurses, midwives and health visitors look to no one else for a fair pay award in April 2000. A fair pay award: so simple, and with such rich rewards.

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Is it curtains for ward fixtures and fittings?

In the grand scheme of things, you may not give much thought to ward curtains. They are just there, part of the ward fixtures and fittings. Sometimes they get in the way, sometimes they give an illusion of privacy to patients subject to yet more medical and nursing indignities in the middle of the ward.

Think how many people swish those curtains around in the course of the day, though, and you begin to realise why a group of students in Portsmouth thought it would be a good idea to carry out a small scale study into the bacterial contamination of curtains in clinical areas.

Now that the curtains have been drawn to your attention, so to speak, you will probably not be surprised to learn that some very nasty contaminants indeed were lurking in the curtain folds. This may not be the most rigorous scientific study in the world, but it will make you pause and ponder.

Read the article and you will never swish those curtains with quite the same abandon again.

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