The UKCC and the General Medical Council considered the future of self-regulation at a conference last week

Nurses and doctors must collaborate on better care

By Paul Dinsdale

THE UKCC and the General Medical Council need to work more closely together to identify a common set of standards for doctors and nurses, a major conference in London was told last week.

Speaking at the second joint UKCC/GMC conference, 'Implementing standards – working together', UKCC chair Alison Norman said there were 'profound changes' in progress in the regulation of the nursing profession.

She argued that the two professions needed to draw up a set of core guidelines for patient care.

'We need to take account of social and healthcare changes in the development of our standards and we need to support collaborative working between the professions and develop effective multidisciplinary teams,' Ms Norman said.

'There could be significant mileage in trying to establish what our two regulatory bodies have in common and try to build on that.'

GMC president Sir Donald Irvine pointed out that the meeting was taking place in a week when the medical profession was under intense scrutiny because of the conviction of Manchester GP Dr Harold Shipman for the murder of 15 patients.

'GPs feel, in a sense, guilty about Dr Shipman's crimes and there are a lot of patients who are going to their doctors who are worried about whether they can trust them,' Sir Donald said.

'We now know what it felt like for the nursing profession at the time of the Beverly Allitt case.'

Sir Donald supported Ms Norman's call for closer collaboration between the two bodies.

At a press briefing earlier in the week, health secretary Alan Milburn said that the health service had to learn the lessons of the Shipman case.

'Increasingly, the accountability issue can no longer be fudged. It has the potential to alter fundamentally the relationships between patients, doctors, the regulatory bodies and the health service... for the better,' Mr Milburn said.

Commenting on the Shipman case, RCN adviser in primary care Mark Jones said: 'If any member of the team suspects bad practice, there must be robust mechanisms for them to raise their concerns.'

New approach benefits patients

NURSES HAVE helped to implement good standards of care in a number of innovative projects around the country, the conference heard.

At the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford, clinical nurse specialists have helped to set up a scheme to deal with female oncology patients.

Nurses play a greater role in the management of patients with conditions such as abnormal uterine bleeding, incontinence and sexual problems.

Gladys Hardwick, a clinical nurse specialist, said that the scheme had helped patients to receive more sensitive care during a very difficult time.

'When a patient arrives at the clinic, she has an initial interview with the nurse, followed by a clinical evaluation by the doctor,' Ms Hardwick said.

'The findings are then explained by the doctor, and then the patient has the opportunity for a final discussion with the nurse.

'This procedure helps the woman to cope more easily with the condition, which can have severe emotional and mental effects.'

At Birmingham Women's Hospital nurses have been involved in a series of audits which have been used to improve standards in its neonatal care unit.

Nurse manager Liz Green said an audit of breastfeeding involving midwives with special expertise had helped to identify areas that needed improving.

The audit system has now been rolled out to all departments within the hospital.

Unify healthcare education

PROFESSIONAL education for nurses and doctors must be integrated more closely if common standards are to be achieved, the conference was told.

Eric Thomas, dean of Southampton University medical school, said patient demands and multidisciplinary teamwork required a more unified approach to education.

At Southampton, nursing, medical and professions allied to medicine students receive most of their training in the same groups.

'We need to integrate clinical and nursing skills more closely,' Professor Thomas said.

'This needs to come from the top, that is, from the vice-chancellor. Other factors are important, such as students being on the same site; a designated lead for integration; early and thorough consultation; and local and regional NHS support.'

Tips for success in teamworking

STANDARDS FOR team-based working can be developed by examining care pathways for patients, the conference heard.

Jenny Leggett, director of nursing at Nottingham City Hospital, said a team needed a minimal amount of management intervention, a sense of ownership and accountability by staff.

'We provided coaching for team leaders, and rewards, including financial incentives, to teams for meeting their targets. We also made use of personal development plans and performance-based assessment,' Ms Leggett said.