Campaign aims to raise continence service profile

JOINT GUIDANCE on how to ensure continence services are higher on the healthcare agenda is to be launched this week by the RCN and a group of leading charities.

It covers how to profile practice areas, estimate the cost effectiveness of improved services, assess the impact of incontinence and assess potential improvements in patients' quality of life.

Making a Case for Investment in Continence Services was drawn up in conjunction with the Continence Foundation, the Association for Continence Advice, Incontinence and the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Women's Health.

It follows the publication last week of health department guidance on continence services. The government guidance sets targets for primary and community health-care teams, primary care groups (PCGs) and trusts (PCTs), and health authorities, and offers advice on how to achieve them.

For example, health authorities and PCGs are asked to compare the number of whole-time equivalent continence specialist nurses employed per 100,000 population with the number employed by other commissioning groups.

And it says health authorities, PCGs and PCTs should commission integrated services led by a director, usually a specialist continence nurse or physiotherapist.

RCN policy and practice adviser Sue Thomas said the government guidance marked a shift in policy from providing a containment service to identifying cases and addressing the causes of incontinence.

"But she said it did not go far enough in tackling variation in services. 'The points are identified but we don't have anything in it that's mandatory. It's down to nurses to lobby, so primary care groups and trusts still give continence a higher priority.'"

Copies of the government guidance Good practice in continence services are being sent to all NHS trusts, health authorities and PCGs. The RCN guidance is available from RCN Direct on 0345 726 100.

By Nick Liley

Clampdown on generic drug cost

THE GOVERNMENT has announced plans to clamp down on the escalating price of generic medicines and preserve more NHS resources for nursing and other care services.

Launching the proposals last week, health minister Lord Hunt cited figures showing that the price of generic drugs had risen by 45 per cent in the past 15 months, costing the health service around £200 million last year.

He said the NHS had been 'ripped off' and that it had been forced to 'divert resources from other care services'.

The proposals, which are out for consultation until May 24, include setting a price ceiling for the main generic medicines corresponding to the average maximum prices in the drug tariff for November 1998.

They also suggest fines of up to £10,000 a day for pharmaceutical companies that fail to comply with new rules.

Lord Hunt fell short of naming and shaming pharmaceutical companies but said it was clear that 'some players took advantage of the situation within the supply chain'.

Copies of the consultation document are available online at www.doh.gov.uk/gendcon