Guidelines for sick newborns

PLANS FOR guidelines for the treatment of very ill newborns have been welcomed by nurses following a report into the death of 28 infants who used an experimental ventilator.

The government is proposing stricter checks on hospital research and trials, and a central office to provide support for local ethics committees.

Safeguards could also be introduced ensuring valid consent is given by guardians for research trials on babies.

The moves follow a report into the use of a ventilator at North Staffordshire Hospital.

RCN paediatric nursing adviser Sue Burr said: 'This report highlights the ethical and practical difficulties of achieving consent in a highly pressurised environment. We would welcome guidance from the government. This will ensure parents are given the support and choices to assist them in making what they believe are the right decisions.'

Nurses to help seek consent

A QUALIFIED nurse should be present when relatives' consent is sought by clinicians to remove organs or other materials from a dead body, a report by the Bristol Royal Infirmary inquiry team has recommended.

The call, which along with other recommendations in the report is being considered by the government, was welcomed by RCN adviser in nursing practice Rosie Wilkinson.

'In many cases this is what already happens,' she said. 'Nurses build a close relationship with the family and it is good to see the inquiry recognising this.'

Researchers to question patients in hospital waiting rooms and GP surgeries

Government seeks public opinion in NHS update...

By Graham Scott

FURTHER DETAILS of the mass consultation exercise being conducted by the government emerged last week as ministers started their tour of England in search of ideas on how to modernise the health service.

The first meetings in the RCN's Turning Talk Into Action campaign were also held as nurses tried to come up with local solutions to local problems.

The government began its consultation of staff and patients by sending a minister or senior civil servant to an NHS trust in each of the eight English regions. Before meeting nurses at St Thomas' hospital, London, health secretary Alan Milburn announced that May 31 will be NHS Census Day, on which researchers will attend GP surgeries and hospital waiting rooms to elicit patients' views.

Next week the government will issue 12 million leaflets to all hospitals and surgeries, as well as supermarkets and chemists, asking the public for their views. And a website has been set up at www.nhs.uk/nationalplan for anyone to contribute to the debate.

Two public meetings are planned, in Leeds on May 20 and in London on June 3, at which 100 people will be able to make their recommendations. Invitations will be sent to a representative sample of members of the public in the Leeds and London areas.

The results of the various strands of consultation will be analysed and presented to a joint meeting of the six Modernisation Action Teams, which comprise civil servants, professionals, managers and patients, on June 15 and 16.

A National Plan for the future of the NHS will then be drawn up and published at the end of June.

The budget for the consultation exercise is £500,000.

'The time has come to have an NHS where patients are listened to and not talked at,' Mr Milburn said.

...but staff response is mixed

NURSES WHO had the chance to tell the government how they thought the NHS should be modernised welcomed the opportunity but said they feared ministers are paying them lip service.

Pay, housing, bed blocking and waiting lists were among the issues raised by nurses as the tour began last week. But ministerial assurances that this is a 'serious and genuine' exercise have failed to dispel scepticism completely.

Speaking after a visit to Frimley Park Hospital, Surrey, by health minister John Hutton, intensive care sister Niru Linsley said: 'He knew all the right noises to make and all the good words to say.'

But she added: 'Despite the scepticism, this is our opportunity to make sure the money being ploughed in is spent where it needs to be spent.'

Staff nurse Iain Wheatley also met Mr Hutton and said: 'He was a typical politician and skirted all the major issues.'

NHS Executive chief executive Sir Alan Langlands visited Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust.

Sheena Kelly, clinical leader for learning disability services, said: 'I am the eternal optimist. At least the government has asked us for our comments. Only time will tell.'

The ministerial team continues its tour of the regions this week.