Government forced to withdraw ad

THE GOVERNMENT has been forced to withdraw claims that two out of three nurses earn £20,000 or more a year. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) instructed the health department to remove the claim from its nurse recruitment advertisements. The figure included overtime, night duty, weekend and substitution pay.

Josie Irwin, secretary of the joint unions body staff side, said: ‘This shows the scale of misunderstanding about pay.’

A health department spokesperson accepted that the advert would need changing if it were used again, but added: ‘Hopefully, by Christmas we should have another 5,000 nurses in the NHS, which is what the campaign is all about.’

Irish nurses on brink of strike

NURSES IN the Republic of Ireland were due to start strike action this week in pursuit of a long-standing pay claim.

The main sticking point in the dispute, which has been running for three years, is over the government’s refusal to pay long-service increments to staff nurses.

Unions say the rises are needed to solve a staffing crisis, but the government says paying a large rise to the 28,000 members of the profession could jeopardise the country’s economic progress.

Survey highlights the need to target E grade nurses as part of the drive to retain staff

RCN demands reward for experienced nurses

EXPERIENCED NURSES are the backbone of the NHS and must be rewarded by a decent pay rise next year, the RCN has told the profession’s pay review body (RB).

It said last year’s award of 12.7 per cent to newly qualified nurses improved recruitment to the profession, but the 4.7 per cent paid to the rest did nothing to encourage experienced nurses to stay.

RCN general secretary Christine Hancock said: ‘Last year’s pay award, particularly its emphasis on recruitment, was quite successful.

‘But there still is a real problem over shortages and the need to keep in the health service experienced nurses who are the backbone of the health service.

‘We believe there is a false sense of security. The problem of nurse shortages is certainly not solved.’

The college backed up its case by releasing the findings of the largest annual survey of nurses’ views, which found that better pay is the number one factor which would encourage nurses to stay in the NHS.

Significantly, better pay was given as the most important factor by a higher percentage of nurses on grade E than any other grade.

The survey of more than 4,000 nurses was carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the RCN. Its findings are contained in a report titled On The Agenda: Changing Nurses’ Careers in 1999.

The survey found that among experienced staff nurses, more than half work excess hours, typically the equivalent of an extra shift each week.

In total, more than 75 per cent of nurses work additional hours to earn extra money.

And it found that around 10 per cent of those who qualify and register are not working for the NHS one year after qualifying.

At a press conference to publish its evidence, the RCN also launched a campaign to highlight the need to retain experienced nurses in the NHS.

At risk: the backbone of the NHS features grade E nurse Mr Corbett (above) who has eight years’ experience but who is thinking of leaving the NHS.

‘I came in on my day off, study in my own time and would never dream of going home at the end of my shift if we were in the middle of an emergency.

‘But there needs to be some acknowledgement of what we do in our pay,’ she says.

See analysis pages 14-15

Nurse wins ten-year grading fight

BALWANT GILL has finally won his clinical grading dispute after a ten-year battle.

A night charge nurse at the former Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, Mr Gill was ranked a grade F when clinical grading was introduced at the hospital in 1988.

He immediately appealed and, like many other nurses who did so, was offered £750. But he refused to settle and held out, claiming he should have been paid as a grade G.

Finally, his perseverance has paid off and he will receive a backdated settlement. But he says the issue was not about money, but about obtaining justice.

I feel very proud. I was sure I would win,’ he said. ‘It will not make so much difference financially but it will make a difference morally. I felt I had been done wrong and now I feel as if things have been put right.’

However, he said it had annoyed him that the dispute had taken so long to sort out. ‘I wish it could have been settled earlier on,’ he said.

Jane Paterson, the RCN steward who supported his case, said: ‘Night sisters and charge nurses were difficult to fit into the system and many missed out.’

Ms Paterson said 30 per cent of nurses were unhappy with their grades when the new clinical grading system was introduced, and she has been dealing with appeals in the West Midlands for the past three years.

‘Whenever I start talking about clinical grading, nurses are still angry about it. It’s about their recognition at that time,’ she said.

Mr Gill left Selly Oak Hospital in 1994, when it became part of University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. He now works at Perry Lock Nursing Home in Birmingham.

A spokesperson for the trust said: ‘This was a long-standing claim and we are pleased it has now been properly concluded.’