Income support rise is ‘paltry’

NURSING HOME owners have reacted angrily to the government’s decision to increase income support rates for residents by only £5 a week to £330 a week from next April.

Registered Nursing Homes Association chief executive Frank Ursell described the increase as ‘paltry and totally inadequate’ to meet owners’ costs. Mr Ursell is to write to health secretary Alan Milburn, chancellor Gordon Brown and social security secretary Alistair Darling, who announced the increase last week, to call for a more generous sum.

National Care Homes Association chair Barry Hartley pointed out that the increase was below the rate of inflation. ‘The government must be aware of the precarious state of the nursing homes sector and the threat that is posed to elderly people by home closures,’ he said.

Plans to introduce a tighter regulatory structure for nursing and residential care homes were expected to be included in the Queen’s speech marking the new session of parliament this week.

Review of sexual health policy

NURSES UNDERTAKING work in the area of sexual health are being invited to contribute to a review of the RCN’s sexual health strategy – and possibly help shape government policy in the process.

The review, to be conducted between now and the end of next year, will run parallel with a health department policy review.

The RCN’s review is being led by its adviser in sexual health Steve Jamieson, who is also a member of the reference group conducting the health department’s review.

To contribute write to Mr Jamieson at RCN, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1M 0AB, or email steve.jamieson@rcn.org.uk

A&没错 department plans to separate adult and teenage drinkers to avert violence

Under age drinkers to get own ward over New Year

By Linda Steele

A HOSPITAL is to set up a special unit for children who get drunk on New Year’s Eve.

Intoxicated revellers aged 17 and under who need emergency treatment will be nursed in the special ten-bed ward to shield them from possible violence in A&E.

The unit, at City Hospital NHS Trust, Birmingham, will be staffed by ward manager Jon Needham and a grade E paediatric nurse.

‘We didn’t want adult drunks and teenage drunks mixing – there is the chance of violence,’ Mr Needham said.

‘Normally they’d be placed on the children and young people’s ward, but there’ll be a risk management issue if they’re drunk and possibly violent,’ he added.

The patients will either be discharged on the next day or referred to duty social workers, following an assessment by a paediatrician and adolescent mental health nurse practitioner.

‘The issue is whether there are child protection issues or whether they are drunk at a party,’ Mr Needham said.

The charity Alcohol Concern backed the plan and urged other trusts to follow Birmingham’s example. ‘Youth drunkenness is an increasing problem,’ a spokesperson said.

But Cornelia Oddie, deputy director of the pressure group Family and Youth Concern, criticised the plans and called for ‘warnings against drunkenness’.

She said: ‘If preparations are being made for extra facilities for people to go mad and wild over the millennium, I can’t help thinking that’s social condoning.’ But she did concede that ‘drunken hooligans’ should be segregated from other patients.

However, Mr Needham brushed aside the charge that the trust might be colluding in youth drinking by making special preparations. ‘People have to be realistic,’ he said. ‘Children shouldn’t be getting drunk but it’s going to happen and we have to plan for it.’

RCN adviser in nursing practice Rosie Wilkinson said the proposals were ‘an exciting and sensitive way of improving care for young people at a time of high demand for A&E services’.

Plans by Brook Advisory Centres to give emergency contraception to young people in advance of the millennium holiday have been questioned by RCN sexual health officer Steve Jameson. ‘Having this pill in advance implies an expectation to engage in unsafe sex,’ he said. ‘The emphasis should be on safer sex education and barrier contraception rather than emergency pills.’

Largest trial of leg ulcer bandages

NURSES ARE to undertake the world’s largest trial to establish the most effective bandage for treating leg ulcers. Hospital and community nurses in Cumbria, Leeds, North Yorkshire and Charing Cross in London are treating and surveying hundreds of patients for up to two years in a programme run by the University of York’s health studies department.

About one in 100 people develop leg ulcers at some time in their lives. Poor blood return from the legs causes the venous ulcers, also known as varicose ulcers. The best treatment is firm bandaging from the toe to the knee to help the blood return to the heart.

Clinicians in Australia and Europe tend to favour ‘short stretch’, washable, all-cotton bandages, which only require a couple of layers on the leg. A ‘four-layer’ bandage, which can be left on for longer, with fewer trips to see a practice nurse, is widely used in the UK.

‘We can heal the vast majority of leg ulcers and this can have a great effect on the quality of life,’ said Andrea Nelson, research fellow at the university.

‘We are interested in not only how quickly the bandages heal the leg ulcers, but also whether they are comfortable or whether they stop people getting their shoes on and if they slip or need to be reapplied too often.’

RCN Institute head of quality improvement Gill Harvey, who has worked with the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine to develop clinical guidance on treating leg ulcers, welcomed the research.

‘It’s the natural progression because we have evidence of which treatments are effective only up to a certain point,’ she said.

‘All we know is that compression therapy is effective, but within the different types of compression therapy there is not enough evidence to recommend one or the other.’