A MAJOR trust in the south of England has enjoyed great success in advertising for nurses on a regional television station. Seven ‘return-to-practice’ nurses have responded to the advertisement, which was shown 14 times. The trust says this response is more cost-effective than recruiting overseas. Will other trusts follow suit? The NHS has certainly invested an enormous amount of time and money sending staff on recruitment drives abroad over the past year in an attempt to attract nurses to the UK.

In a few years’ time, it will be interesting to discover how those nurses who have responded to the call have fared. There is anecdotal evidence that some overseas recruits are experiencing acts of great kindness. But there are also reports that some are finding their experience as qualified nurses in their country of origin is disregarded as worthless. Fifty years on from the first major overseas recruitment drive to the UK, have prospects changed much for these nurses, particularly those who now find themselves described as belonging to black and ethnic minority groups?

As it stands at the moment, around 8 per cent of the nursing, midwifery and health service workforce is from black and ethnic minority groups. But 99 per cent of health service managers are white. There are a number of initiatives, aimed at tackling the institutional racism that creates barriers to advancement. Many nurses from black and ethnic minority groups are not convinced that producing documents and setting targets will solve the problems caused by racism.

Despite such scepticism, there does seem to be room for optimism for those nurses arriving in this country with an eye on advancing their careers in the NHS. There are outstanding examples of nurses who have risen above the oppression of institutional racism to provide role models and visions of excellence. True, not everyone has accepted the invitation to celebrate diversity yet. But the numbers at the party are increasing.

See Celebrating diversity pages 15-19

Potential for changes in pay system

THERE WAS a tremendous hullabaloo when the government claimed that the average nurse earned £20,000 a year. The outrage from nurses was understandable, given that a nurse with five years’ experience expects to earn around £16,445. Such a nurse would have been financially better off as a police officer with a salary of £21,609 after five years.

This shortfall is one of the arguments being put forward by staff side in its submission to the pay review body for nurses this year. While the British Medical Association is reportedly calling for a 14 per cent pay rise for doctors, the unions and professional organisations representing nursing’s interests are shying away from specific percentages. Instead, they are asking the government to fund a ‘substantial’ rise. Let’s hope the government’s definition of ‘substantial’ matches that of nursing’s definition.

NHS nurses are paid the same salary for the same grade wherever they work in the UK. There are just a few trusts proving the exception to the rule and there is also the rogue factor of London weighting. Still, if you move jobs from one part of the UK to the other, you know what to expect from your salary. But the logic of devolution, the current Agenda for Change talks and moves towards regional incentives in England, all suggest there is potential for change.

Stormy weather ahead on the pay front, perhaps.

See news page 4 and analysis pages 12-14

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