Disappointment from grade D to I

Nurses in each of the clinical grades from D to consultant spoke against this year's pay award, and many accused the government of conning the public.

By Colin Parish

Susan Walker, grade D staff nurse in outpatients, Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust said: "It's not enough, but it never is. I'm not surprised, but I am disappointed. Nurses should be paid the same starting salary as teachers and police officers. It's also not fair that we do not get the local allowance here in Kent. I work in Canterbury but I could not possibly afford to buy property there. I have to live with my parents.'

Janice Mercer-Edwards, grade H cardiology nurse, said: 'Nursing is viewed as inferior to other professions and this award will do nothing to dispel the myth. It will not be enough to retain or recruit nurses. My cousin has left nursing to join the police. Her starting salary was £18,000, increasing to £21,000 by the end of her first year. Within a year she could sit her sergeant's exams with a potential salary of £29,000 if she passes. Needless to say she has no regrets.'

Marjorie Simpson, grade E staff nurse, West Lewisham twilight service, London, said: 'I thought we would be getting more - 7 or 8 per cent - but I am disappointed. There should have been an across the board rise. E grades have to carry the can where there are no F grades. We are the linchpins of the team and should have been rewarded better for what we do.'

Cath Gorman, grade F senior sister, high dependency unit, University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, said: 'The 3.7 per cent rise does not do enough to address the catch-up needed. We were all misled by the headlines about senior nurses getting 5 per cent. I will not get the 5 per cent, and I am supervising grade E nurses who earn more than me - it's a real bugbear of mine. The stress and responsibility in the higher grade is not rewarded.'

Cheryl Cuthbert, grade G health visitor, Stenhousemuir health centre, Forth Valley, said: 'I am a bit disappointed. I thought I would get the 5 per cent but I will only get 3.7 per cent because I have not been on top G for more than a year. I don't think it will encourage people to join the profession. A number of colleagues are leaving and there is no one to take over. We are just keeping things ticking over.'

Donna Parkin, a consultant nurse, said: 'We are already unable to fill consultant nurse vacancies because most are being advertised at the lower end of the pay range. This award will do nothing to help fill these posts. It also says nothing to those who have worked extremely hard to achieve these roles. It only tells us that the financial incentive for taking on such high profile clinical developments is almost nonexistent. Nurses who want to take on more responsibility and work for little financial reward will receive one discretionary point will not benefit.

Main points of this year's report

THE GOVERNMENT has accepted in full the recommendations of the nurses' pay review body (RB). The principal elements of this year's report are:

- 3.7 per cent increase for all nurses from April 1. Practice nurses, nurses in the independent sector and nursing homes, consultant nurses and those employed on local trust contracts will not receive the increases automatically, although the RB recommends that they should. Nursing students are not covered by the awards.

- The first discretionary point at the top of grades F to I to be awarded automatically. Nurses who have been at the top of these grades for a year or more on April 1 will receive the new increment from that date, others when they reach the anniversary of their appointment. Those who already receive one discretionary point will not benefit.

- 3.7 per cent increase in on-call and standby payments and the London allowances.

- Midwives to move automatically from grade E to F without the need for promotion.

- NHS trusts to be told by the health department that they must ensure nurses are not being employed on one grade when their work carries the responsibilities of another.

- Staff who are called out from home must receive overtime paid, not time off in lieu, as pressure of work often means the time is never taken back. The RB said trusts who do not pay overtime are guilty of 'unacceptable exploitation'.

Homes feel the pinch

NURSING HOME owners will find it almost impossible to meet the nurses' pay award of 3.7 per cent because they are already facing serious financial pressures, according to the Registered Nursing Home Association. The RNHA said nursing homes in the independent and voluntary sectors would like to match the 3.7 per cent increase for nurses which was recommended by the nurses' pay review body. But the recent 1.2 per cent annual rise in income support for older people in care, a major element of homes' funding, would make it 'virtually impossible' for owners to afford the pay award.

RNHA chief executive Frank Ursell said: 'While nurses undoubtedly deserve their pay rise, it is a pity the government did not see fit to award at least an equivalent payment to the elderly and disabled people who need their services.'