In brief

More than 80 public health practitioners, most of them nurses, are being appointed in Scotland over the next three years. They will be known as ‘health champions’ and will be based in each local healthcare co-operative. RCN Scottish board secretary James Kennedy said: ‘While it’s great to see nurses placed in the front line in the fight against poor health, there’s no point creating new posts unless you have the nurses to fill them.’

Hearing-impaired and speech-impaired patients in Greater Manchester can now make use of the nurse-led telephone helpline NHS Direct. The local call centre has set up a text telephone service and trained its nurses in how to use it. The new service could benefit up to 200,000 people in the area.

Hygiene training is soon forgotten

TRAINING IN handwashing only has a very short-term effect, with staff quickly reverting to pre-training levels of hygiene if they are not given constant reminders, research has found.

The research, published in the Journal of Hospital Infection, suggests the best way to increase handwashing among healthcare workers is to use a combination of education, written materials, reminders and continued feedback on performance.

RCN infection control adviser Dee May said it is important for nurses to recognise that improving handwashing compliance is not easy or straightforward.

‘This article is welcome because it shows that for all the literature on handwashing, there is a paucity of good evidence about the effects of training,’ Ms May said.

Family values

Members of the same family have been providing nursing care at the Friarage Hospital in North Yorkshire almost continuously since 1948.

Michelle Matthews, right, kept the tradition going when she joined the hospital recently, following in the footsteps of her mother Yvonne, left, and her late grandmother Maureen (in the photograph), who worked at the hospital for more than 20 years.

Gang feud spills into hospital

A VICIOUS FEUD between rival gangs has resulted in two stabbings and brawls inside a hospital in the past five months.

Nurses at University College London Hospitals NHS Trust have seen beatings and knife attacks.

Last week a man told staff he had received a threatening phone call while in the A&E waiting room. The trust drafted in 12 security guards and police as a precaution.

Managers have also locked the department’s entrance between 11am and 7pm, with a security guard on hand to open the doors.

Police have advised staff to transfer suspected gang members to nearby hospitals.

‘It’s intimidating for nurses, but they get used to it,’ said A&E charge nurse Amanda Cogswell, who is researching hospital violence and its prevention.

She said there is daily verbal abuse. Senior A&E staff nurse Chris Gabel estimates about 60 gang members are involved. ‘One night three months ago car loads arrived armed with petrol bombs and knives.’

UCL has been a leader in tackling violence against staff, with two round-the-clock security guards, CCTV, panic buttons and personal alarms for staff.

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A& E staff get go-ahead for limited industrial action

Nurses at Oxford’s John Radcliffe Hospital claim patient safety is being put at risk

By Nick Lipley

THE RCN is preparing to ballot A&E nurses on industrial action at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

Preparations were given the go-ahead last week when the college’s governing council unanimously supported the call for limited industrial action.

Nurses at the A&E department claim a failure by managers to implement recommendations published last year is jeopardising patient safety.

According to the RCN, a ballot may take place within ‘the next few weeks’ and action would have to start within a month of that.

This week college officials will draw up details of A&E staff eligible to vote. Most of the unit’s 70 nurses are understood to be RCN members.

Meanwhile, managers at the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust are stepping up their efforts to resolve the dispute. Their proposals include plans to appoint a consultant nurse for emergency care and to recruit a directorate manager.

They also plan to appoint external emergency care consultants to review and improve the emergency care system.

Trust managers held meetings with 20 of the nurses as well as RCN and NHS Executive officials last week. Chief executive David Highton said: ‘I am disappointed that the RCN has felt it necessary to agree to a possible ballot.

‘I am fully aware of the pressures that nurses in A&E and in other parts of the emergency care system are under and have been working closely with staff to look at ways we can improve things, in the short and longer term.’

RCN regional officer Patricia Marquis said: ‘We are still talking with them to find a way forward.’

But referring to an offer put on the table last week to review the admissions and discharge policy at the unit, Ms Marquis said: ‘It was promised that it would be reviewed last September.’