Academic claims nurses fail to help smokers quit

SMOKERS ARE more likely to ignore quitting smoking advice from a nurse than from their GP, according to a pioneer in the field of smoking cessation.

Medical health senior lecturer at Wolverhampton University Dave Jones told the conference last week that GPs have more impact, possibly because they are often men and people perceive advice from men as more authoritative.

But chair of the RCN practice nurses forum Sara Richards defended the role of nurses, claiming that they often have more success than doctors.

Mr Jones, who set up one of England's first smoking cessation services, acknowledged that nurse-led clinics worked and that they were becoming more popular. But, referring to more general services, he said: 'Only one per cent of people who try to quit on their own manage to do it.'

'If they are advised to do it by their GP this goes up to about two per cent,' he said. When nurses have tried there has been no effect whatsoever. Maybe people had a perception that the advice was better because it was from men.'

Mr Jones said no nurses worked at his clinic because when it was set up he could not find any with the necessary specialist skills. But he said that since the government made it compulsory last year for all health authorities to offer smoking cessation services, more nurses are becoming expert in the field.

Ms Richards defended nurses wherever they worked, saying: 'Doctors tend to say that people will be dead in ten years and frighten them half to death whereas nurses are less abrupt.

'Nurses in cessation clinics have more success than doctors because they spend longer with the patients.'

Mr Jones said that nasal sprays have been among the best methods for helping smokers give up. 'They seemed the most punitive and painful, but they were also the most effective,' he said.

But he added that the most successful techniques for giving up focused on coping with withdrawal symptoms.

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Staff lack training about addiction

MENTAL HEALTH professionals dealing with patients who have drug and alcohol dependencies are to be issued health department guidelines after research has revealed a glaring lack of training.

Studies show that nurses are ill-equipped to deal with 'dual diagnosis' patients and often know less than their clients about drugs and their effects.

Clinical nurse specialist and cognitive behaviour psychotherapist Keith Barry told the conference that this was especially worrying because addiction was prevalent among up to three-quarters of patients with mental illness.

His study showed that of 35 qualified nurses at Llanarth Court Hospital, a medium-secure psychiatric hospital in Gwent, about a third had no training to deal with patients with addictions. A further third had less than one and a half days' training.

Since the survey, the hospital has introduced a compulsory one-day training scheme for all hospital workers in contact with the unit, including non-clinical staff. Qualified nurses are offered two-day courses.

Health department nursing officer for mental health and forensic psychiatry Malcolm Rae told delegates: 'There has been a lack of specific, formal training and preparation. While staff experienced reasonable job satisfaction, there were high levels of burnout and staff turnover.'

The forthcoming guidelines will call for effective multidisciplinary teams and better contact with the voluntary sector.

Child protection referrals drop

A NURSE-LED multi-agency project that helps pregnant women who are drug users has reduced the number of unnecessary referrals to child protection.

The scheme at Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust offered early intervention to support children and families before problems escalated into crises.

Only a minority of the babies went into foster care and most were reunited with their mothers shortly afterwards, the trust's addictive behaviour service locality manager Kerry Notman said.

Random staff tests ruled out

CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLING and occupational health schemes aimed at tackling NHS staff drug use should not be overlooked, according to the RCN.

College occupational health adviser Carol Bannister spoke out following the publication of a report by a government-commissioned working group set up to investigate drug and alcohol abuse among NHS employees.

In its report published this month, the group ruled out the possibility of random drug testing, arguing that it would drive health professionals who have problems underground.

Welcoming the report, Ms Bannister said: 'There ought to be a system in place for nurses and doctors to come clean and get help.'

Union national officer and working party member Jon Richards added: 'There is no empirical evidence that shows that there is a widespread problem in the health service.'