Who's minding the children?

Help with childcare costs could improve staff retention – so often wages barely cover childcare costs. Staff considering returning to practice after maternity leave are more likely to do so if they are confident of assured and flexible childcare provision. At Central Sheffield University Hospitals (before it merged this April) maternity 'returners' increased by 36 per cent following the appointment of a childcare co-ordinator.

If we are to meet the requirements of the government's NHS modernisation programme, all trusts should be encouraged to appoint a childcare co-ordinator sooner rather than later. Apart from the fact that the NHS Plan states that they have to do this eventually, the sooner childcare issues are addressed the sooner we will see an improvement in staffing levels.

Consider the return on investment: for the same cost as training three new nurses we can provide the incentive for many more valued staff to stay in post.

Putting a little of the budget aside to invest in a childcare co-ordinator and fund initiatives pays off. The outlay required to provide childcare support services is a drop in the ocean. And if we really want to persuade staff that the NHS is a great place to work, it is an outlay that every trust has to make.

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As the RCN opens its doors to healthcare assistants for the first time, Linda Thomas wonders what Ms Nightingale would have to say about the historic move

Remember all the to-do a couple of years ago about whether Florence Nightingale was a suitable role model for today’s nurses? Tell you what, her common sense opinions on matters related to nurses and nursing seem just as apposite now as they undoubtedly were during her lifetime.

As the anniversary of her birthday is marked during nurses' week, the Royal College of Nursing opens its doors officially to nurse cadets and to healthcare assistants with S/NVQ level 3. So what would Miss Nightingale have made of this historic move?

Well, we can probably get a good idea from her surviving words of wisdom. The terminology may sound a bit dated, but it is not difficult to understand what Ms Nightingale was getting at in setting down her opinions.

She had no truck with conceited nurses for a start, and she was pretty impatient about 'the present rage for certificates and badges... Some of our best nurses are without either' (Baly 1991).

Nurse historians might be able to hazard a guess at what her views on the current education system for nurses might be. It certainly seems likely that she would have no problem in valuing the contribution made by healthcare assistants in their supporting role.

That seems to have been the view of the vast majority of RCN members who voted in favour of opening membership of their professional organisation to their healthcare assistant colleagues.

For the minority who objected, some vociferously, it will take a little while to get used to the idea. Just as it did when men were admitted into RCN membership in 1960, and student nurses in 1968, and enrolled nurses in 1970.

The times they are a-changing once again.

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