Royal visit as Hancock says farewell to RCN

Princess Anne visited the RCN's refurbished headquarters in London last week to perform the official opening. She is pictured with student Peace Ajiboye in the new library. Later, health and political leaders were among guests at a reception to mark the departure of RCN general secretary Christine Hancock. Miss Hancock is pictured with her local MP and former health secretary Frank Dobson.

'Don't privatise nursing services'

THERE IS no evidence that contracting out NHS clinical services leads to improved care standards, an influential political think-tank has said.

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) director Matthew Taylor told BBC Radio 4's Today programme there should be no ideological barrier to the introduction of public private partnerships.

But in a report published this week the IPPR says it would not argue for the private sector running NHS hospitals and employing nurses and doctors.

Institutional racism claim

A REPORT commissioned by the government says racism in the NHS is 'largely unrecorded, with little action taken to solve the problem or give redress'.

The report by consultants Lemos and Crane has not been published but a copy was leaked to the press last week. Consultants found half the ethnic minority staff had suffered harassment last year.

A health department spokesperson would not comment until the report is published, after it has been peer reviewed.

NHS Plan cannot work without 'thousands of extra practice nurses', conference told

Doctors drop opposition to nurse-led NHS Direct

By Christian Duffin

THE NURSE-LED services NHS Direct and walk-in centres received a massive boost last week when GPs effectively ended their opposition to the initiatives.

At their annual conference in London they voted overwhelmingly to reject resolutions calling for the services to be abolished.

A motion claiming that NHS Direct and walk-in centres were damaging patient care by re-directing scarce resources was also comfortably defeated. Some doctors said NHS Direct was dramatically cutting their workloads, sometimes by up to 50 per cent.

Peter Gledhill from Bedfordshire said: 'NHS Direct managers always respond positively and the nurses are brilliant.'

Some GPs were still sceptical of the schemes but thought it futile to oppose them now that Labour had achieved a second term. GPs would have more influence trying to shape the schemes rather than blocking them, they argued.

East Yorkshire GP Hamish Meldrum said: 'Anyone who thinks NHS Direct and walk-in centres are going to go away just because this conference thinks they should is in cloud-cuckoo-land.'

Meanwhile the conference was also told that thousands of extra practice nurses are needed if doctors are going to meet the targets set out in the NHS Plan.

GP researcher Malcolm Fox said every GP would need a full-time equivalent practice nurse to cope with the extra work. If the four UK countries adopted similar targets this equates to well over 10,000 extra nurses.

'The NHS Plan talks about 20,000 extra nurses but that's just the number needed in hospitals. They haven't thought about practice or community nurses,' said Dr Fox, who has researched the role of practice nurses and their reimbursement arrangements with doctors.

But RCN practice nurses association chair Sara Richards said the target was unattainable. 'It's not possible if you think about how many are going to retire in the next few years.'

Ombudsman critical of nursing care

THE FAILURE to deliver essential nursing care was one of the three main themes to emerge from the latest annual report by health service ombudsman Michael Buckley.

The ombudsman also highlighted cases caused by poor communication between staff and a lack of support and supervision of junior members of staff.

Mr Buckley made it clear in his report that a lack of resources did not give staff a licence to underperform. Citing a case in which nurses successively failed to administer antibiotics to a patient, he said: 'The fact that resources are limited does not automatically exonerate the body concerned from responsibility for poor service or treatment.

'It is not enough to say, for example, that the ward or clinic was exceptionally busy, if no effective steps had been taken to manage care appropriately in admittedly difficult circumstances.'

Mr Buckley received 2,595 complaints. Of these, he accepted 241 for a full investigation and completed reports in 204 cases.