Managers punish rather than help ‘problem nurses’

By Christian Duffin

NURSES who underachieve at work are handled vindictively instead of being offered support and training, research has shown.

And a separate study has found that nurses are often in the dark about the standards expected and fear retribution if they highlight areas where care is substandard.

The two pieces of research, by Hannah Cooke and Moira Attree of Manchester University, will be considered in discussions about the UKCC’s revamped code of conduct, due to be issued in April.

Ms Cooke studied the identification and treatment of ‘problem nurses’ and found a lack of trust between them and managers.

The nurses were handled inconsistently and punitively by managers reluctant to seek a ‘fair blame’ approach, she discovered during interviews with 132 nurses, managers, human resource officers, professional organisations and union representatives.

Ms Attree interviewed 142 registered nurses from three large acute NHS trusts and found they were often unclear about standards and who had set them.

Nurses did not know what standards they were expected to reach and many were frustrated that the quality of care they gave fell far below the standards to which they aspired. They felt pressured and demoralised.

‘One problem was that named nurses were being interrupted,’ Ms Attree said. ‘On one drug round a nurse was interrupted twice with every patient. That’s dangerous and high risk. Doctors and physios, for example, need to be educated to find the answers to some of their questions themselves by looking at patient notes. One nurse said she wanted a sign like they have on buses saying not to disturb the drivers.’

A spokesperson for the UKCC, which funded the two studies, said: ‘We will draw the reports to the attention of senior health service managers and policy makers so that they are able to address the important issues and concerns raised.’

RCN occupational health adviser Carol Bannister said: ‘The two pieces of research are important. I couldn’t disagree with any of it. We should welcome it and hope that it’s acted on.’

Call to curb overuse of sedatives

HEALTHCARE professionals and patients must be made more aware of the side effects of sedative and anti-psychotic drugs, the director of nursing at Europe’s largest nursing home has warned.

Linda Nazarko from the Nightingale home in London was responding to the findings of a survey by the Liberal Democrats showing that the number of prescriptions given to elderly people has risen by 70 per cent in a year.

She called for a major education programme to curb the increasing reliance on sedatives and anti-psychotic drugs.

Many patients and staff do not realise that overuse increases the likelihood of falls and incontinence, she said.

The Liberal Democrats had released figures compiled by the health department showing there were 428,800 prescriptions for the over-sixties in 2000 compared with 252,700 in 1999.

The party’s spokesperson for elderly people Paul Burstow accused care homes of turning to a ‘chemical cocktail of drugs to keep people quiet’.

Ms Nazarko said: ‘We need a huge education campaign for nursing homes, hospitals and community settings.’

Put your oar in

An award scheme for people with diabetes who achieve success in sport, the workplace or elsewhere was launched last week by five times Olympic gold medallist Sir Steve Redgrave, pictured, who has diabetes. Nurses are being encouraged to nominate patients for the Outstanding Achievement and Recognition Awards. For an entry form, visit www.oarawards.co.uk