In brief

Police in three counties have joined forces to investigate whether oxygen tubes used during surgery may have been tampered with. Essex, Hertfordshire and Dorset police are examining four cases in which 'foreign objects' have been found in tubes. In one case a patient died. Part of the investigation will look at whether a single member of staff was on duty at the time of all the incidents.

Girls in primary schools have limited access to sanitary towels, despite the fact that nearly one in eight starts menstruating before they begin secondary education. Research published in last week's British Medical Journal found that only 1 per cent of schools had a vending machine in the girls' toilets. RCN policy and practice adviser Carol Bannister said school nurses and teachers should be addressing the issue within the context of their sexual health strategy.

Care plan reduces violence on wards

A NEW approach to mental health nursing has reduced violent incidents on acute wards and cut the average length of stay by a quarter, according to research published today in Nursing Standard.

Researchers at Newcastle City Health NHS Trust, one of 25 pilot sites, found the person-centred Tidal Model also reduced the number of compulsory admissions under the Mental Health Act.

Researcher/practitioner Elaine Fletcher said that while many nurses would claim to provide person-centred care, the Tidal Model makes it inevitable. 'The nurse and patient write a daily care plan in the patient's own words and the patient signs it and keeps the original,' Ms Fletcher said.

'It's very empowering for patients because they are more able to see progress. Even if the changes are very small they can see some progress and are less likely to want to leave or feel frustrated because they feel nothing is happening.'

RCN Institute mental health programme acting director Ann Jackson said: 'Many practising nurses on acute wards are keen to respond to a barrage of criticisms through a range of development initiatives. This model importantly emphasises the person at the centre of care and enhances the unique role of psychiatric nurses.'

She added: 'We look forward to service user evaluation, and would welcome information, resources and cultural change required to support implementation of this model outside a research context.'

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New guidance based on emergency admissions project could reduce waiting times

Better patient flow cuts trolley waits in A&E units

By Colin Parish

A&E WAITING times could tumble if results of a pilot project that improved the flow of admissions are reproduced across the UK.

The findings of the government's National Patient Access Team (NPAT) project have been turned into guidance that will be published next month.

NPAT's director of emergency service programmes, A&E nurse Karen Castille, said it was important to recognise that trolley waits are not just an A&E problem, but were caused by many factors in a hospital. 'Trolley waits are a symptom, not the problem,' Ms Castille said.

'The majority of the changes we made were outside the A&E department and depended on the local situation.'

She said although there was nothing new in the guidance, 'if it is followed it does ensure the basics are done properly and the flow of patients improves'.

The 16 NHS trusts involved in the pilot project employed full-time trolley managers who were trained and supported to look at the wider picture in the hospital.

NPAT national project manager Sue Greenslade, who worked as a trolley manager at Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust, north London, said patients who need in-depth assessments traditionally have long waits.

'We focused the skills of staff on this group to keep these patients flowing through the department,' she said.

Ms Greenslade said employing discharge facilitators also had a significant impact. 'They improved the relationship between staff working in primary and community care, and reduced delayed discharges and overall length of patients' stay in hospital,' she said.

RCN nursing practice adviser Rosie Wilkinson said: 'We have been saying for years that trolley waits are part of a whole hospital problem. Anything that improves access and the quality of care in A&E has to be a good thing.'

Improving the Flow of Emergency Admissions – Key Questions and Action Steps will be available shortly. For further information call 0116 222 5100.