Workload pressures are the key to recruitment difficulties, say nursing leaders

**Action plan won’t solve Scotland’s staffing crisis**

By Steven Black

A PACKAGE of measures designed to overcome growing recruitment and retention problems in Scotland has won only a lukewarm reception from nursing leaders.

Health minister Susan Deacon announced the initiatives shortly before 80 representatives of nursing and management organisations met in Edinburgh to discuss the crisis.

They include two recruitment campaigns – one will run immediately to encourage former nurses to help out over the winter, and the second addressing Scotland’s more deep-rooted problems.

But the RCN was clearly disappointed when Ms Deacon said she was only prepared to pilot a scheme that will see nurse returners receive grants of up to £1,000 to tide them over while they follow refresher courses.

Other measures were more warmly welcomed, in particular a £200,000 investment that will pay for 1,000 nurses to follow the RCN’s ward leadership programme. So far, only 108 nurses in Scotland have completed the training.

The Executive has also promised to set up a Recruitment and Retention Centre which will oversee workforce planning, pool ideas and spread best practice.

In total Ms Deacon has allocated £1.5 million to the various initiatives and to implementing other ideas to come out of the Edinburgh convention. RCN Scottish board secretary James Kennedy said: ‘We welcome the resources outlined at the nursing convention as a first step towards addressing the recruitment and retention difficulties. However, we are concerned that the key issue of workload pressures is not going to be resolved at this stage.

‘We will be carefully examining the Scottish Executive’s report on the convention and will continue our campaign to ensure all our nurses are properly valued.’

Speaking after the convention, Ms Deacon’s deputy, Malcolm Chisholm, said a report on the proceedings would be published within a fortnight. Further ‘mini-conventions’ would be held locally to maintain momentum, he said.

Mr Chisholm defended the decision only to pilot the scheme for grants to nurse returners.

‘People will realise that we will want to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives and make sure that they are sustainable,’ he said.

‘So it’s not that we’re saying we’re not going to have return to practice courses, it’s really a matter of evaluating them.’

Mr Chisholm said the principal theme to emerge from the talks was the need for more flexible working arrangements.

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**Care home standards to be set**

A DRIVE to ensure all care homes in Scotland meet a set of minimum standards has been launched by the Scottish executive.

Last week the executive published a set of standards for care homes to be policed by a new Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care.

Launching the standards last week, health minister Susan Deacon said: ‘Standards of care vary a great deal. Older people and their families should be able to have confidence in the care offered wherever they live and whoever provides it.’

According to the standards, from next April older people will receive care that changes to meet their needs and food that is varied, nutritious and suited to individual requirements.

Older people will also be actively involved in developing their ‘personal care plans’ and be supported to stay active.

Care homes registering after April 1 must offer the choice of single rooms, a standard that existing homes have until 2007 to meet. There will also be an end to the legal distinction between residential and nursing care homes.