A FIERY protest by health visitors against their union leadership has revealed deep divisions within the profession.

Dozens gathered with placards at the weekend claiming that weak leadership within the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association (CPHVA) had failed to ensure health visitors were featured in the title of the new regulatory body, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The protest was held before an 'open forum' in London called by CPHVA leaders for representatives of the unions' 157 UK centres.

CPHVA leaders rejected the claims and said the crucial issue was that they had verbal assurances from health secretary Alan Milburn that the NMC would have a separate register for health visitors and that health visitors would have permanent council representation.

Director Jackie Carnell said she had campaigned hard on the NMC title issue, but admitted she had 'slipped up' in not emphasising it as much as other issues. "If I hadn't been passionate in this area we would not be on the new council," she added.

But protesters were scathing in their criticism. Mary Daly from Ban­net, said: 'There's no choice. We've been forced to choose between the profession and the union.'

By Karen Murray

UK HEALTH professionals are presenting a 'united front' in the aftermath of the first attacks against Afghanistan to safeguard the health needs of the Afghan population.

In a proposed response, already endorsed by the RCN, nursing and medical organisations 'unreservedly condemn' the attacks on New York and Washington, but stipulate that the 'paramount concern' of health professionals should be the Afghan people and others in the region whose health and well-being is at risk.

Nearly 170,000 Afghans are thought to be suffering from starvation despite aid being delivered. They also face a range of diseases, including dysentery, tuberculosis, malaria and highly contagious Crimean-Congo fever.

According to the joint statement: 'There is an urgent need to monitor the health of the population as events unfold and to make this information widely known and acted upon in a way appropriate to the people of that country.

'In the longer term, we urge that in formulating foreign policy governments should assess the impacts of their proposed actions on the health and human rights of their own people and those likely to be affected in the wider world.'

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has called for moves to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief.

Chief executive officer Judith Oulton said: 'Safe delivery of food and medical supplies required for nurses and others to assist the swelling numbers of displaced persons in Afghanistan is a priority.'

She added that the ICN believes it is critical that all efforts are made to limit the effect of military attacks on the civilian population.

Nigel Impey of the London-based aid charity Merlin, which has approximately 60 staff based in Afghanistan, said it was too early to say what impact this week's attacks would have on their work in the region.

Mr Impey said: 'The plight of the people on the ground is our main concern. We know these people were already suffering.'

Forces short of trained nurses

NURSES IN Britain's armed forces are facing the prospect of hostilities in the Middle East while being more than 40 per cent below strength.

Nurses are among the 1,000 members of the Defence Medical Services supporting 20,000 personnel of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force in the area. According to July figures, there are 1,197 trained deployable nurses in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS), the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps and the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service, against a requirement of 2,012.

Commodore Judith Brown, director of defence nursing services and QARNNS matron in chief, said: 'Recruitment of nurse trainees is buoyant.'

But, according to the defence select committee, the shortage of nurses will have serious implications for a prolonged war.

Issac Rowbottom

joined in the health visitors' protest

Listen!

I love my health visitor

Heath visitors denounce weak leadership

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