Survey predicts exodus of ‘overworked’ PCT health professionals within two years

Paperwork leaves primary care managers disillusioned

By Sarah Harrison

HALF OF all nurses, doctors and other health professionals running primary care trusts (PCTs) say they plan to leave in the next two years.

A survey of 402 healthcare workers on the management teams of PCTs found 91 per cent felt it was impossible to do the extra work involved because their clinical workload is too high.

The government phased in PCTs in recent years to implement NHS reforms in their local areas. But the health professionals put in charge say they are over-burdened with bureaucracy.

RCN community health adviser Lynn Young said it is no surprise that nurses who have ‘gallantly’ chosen to work for PCTs are being overwhelmed by the workload and now want to concentrate on caring for their patients. ‘The nurses I have spoken to had the energy and ideas and they wanted action. What they did not want was 9,000 pieces of paperwork to read before a meeting on structural organisation and management. It is sad because it has removed people’s enthusiasm,’ she said.

The survey, carried out jointly by the NHS Alliance and the journal Primary Care Report, found that 69 per cent of respondents felt their clinical workload discouraged them from getting involved in PCT management.

A further 65 per cent said there were too many meetings, and 47 per cent said there was not enough new money getting through. Of the 167 clinicians working in PCTs that were questioned, 64 per cent thought there were too many targets and 50 per cent blamed central and regional NHS management.

NHS Alliance chief executive Michael Sobanjia said: ‘The NHS simply cannot afford a haemorrhage of clinician involvement like this. They are the people who know better than anyone else what their patients and local populations need.’

A Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘We are aware of the pressures many primary care professionals are experiencing as a result of their work for PCTs.

‘That is why we are making more help available, including through the PCT support organisation the National Primary and Care Trust Development Programme to take some of the pressure off.

‘We will continue to try and find ways of increasing this support.’

But shadow health secretary Liam Fox said: ‘PCTs were created to take some of the pressure off.

‘But they haven’t been able to do that because of the bureaucracy and the paperwork. It is now time to cut back on the red tape and the paperwork, and allow nurses and doctors to get on with the job which they were trained to do.’

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Infection from flowers ‘unlikely’

BANNING HOSPITAL visitors from bringing in flowers because of fears the bouquets are unhygienic is unnecessary, infection control nurses have said.

Christine Perry, chair of the Infection Control Nurses’ Association, said vase water can carry pseudomonas, gram-negative organisms that occur in water left standing at room temperature. But the chance of patients becoming infected is ‘extremely unlikely’, she said, with the possibility of water being spilled posing a greater risk to patients.

She was commenting on a snap-shot survey by a national newspaper which found that several hospitals had banned flowers from the bedside on some of their wards because vase water could carry infections.

A spokesperson for one of the hospitals, the Royal Shrewsbury, told Nursing Standard: ‘In our surgical wards we request visitors not to bring flowers because of the faint possibility of infection from the water. There are no flowers in intensive care because patients have to be moved quickly.’

The Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, conducted a six-month pilot study covering a surgical ward in which flowers were banned. It revealed ‘anecdotal evidence’ of lower infection rates. A spokesperson said: ‘It is now a policy that the three surgical wards don’t allow flowers.’ She said the infection control unit which carried out the study had not yet provided her with any figures to back up their claims.

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