**CHARITY PLEA FOR NURSES**

An aid charity has issued an urgent appeal for more nurses and midwives to travel to Niger, west Africa, to help treat victims of starvation.

Goal, a UK charity that gives aid and provides health care in poorer countries, has been asked by the United Nations to distribute 450 tonnes of food.

There is a particular need for nurses and midwives who speak French, the national language. Sinead O’Reilly, a Goal nurse working in Niger, said: ‘The people are desperate. They require urgent feeding and medical attention.’

Any nurses who want to apply for work in Niger should send their CVs to applications@goal-uk.org

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**Trust set to implement formal three-yearly test of nurses’ skills**

**By Christian Duffin**

An NHS trust is preparing to test its nurses’ skills every three years.

The test – for band five nurses – is likely to consist of an assessment of practical skills and a formal exam, perhaps on computers. Calculations of drug doses and administration of medicine are expected to feature prominently in the Barts and the London NHS Trust initiative.

Some questions will be common but certain sections will be tailored for different branches of nursing.

Nurses failing the test will be given extra training and managers hope they will not need to fire any staff, a trust spokesperson said. ‘We would give nurses the opportunity to re-sit the test. We would have to look at what to do if someone kept failing. That will involve discussions with unions and nurses.’

He denied that the trust had had a particular problem with drug dose miscalculations, and said the move was designed to produce better nurses. The trust has not set a date because precise details have not been finalised.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) president Jonathan Asbridge has previously called on trusts to consider such an initiative.

‘It is a recognition that the regulation of professionals has to be about maintaining fitness for practice’

Mr Asbridge was unavailable to comment but an NMC spokesperson said: ‘This trust seems to be the only one that has gone so far as to propose a programme.’

Mr Asbridge was director of nursing at Barts until last year, when he became A&E patients’ champion at the Department of Health. He believes nurses should be tested in a way similar to pilots, who are required to sit regular flight simulation exams.

NHS Employers, the body responsible for human resources across the health service, supports the initiative. Deputy director Alastair Henderson said it is worth investing the extra resources and time.

He said: ‘It is recognition that the regulation of professionals has to be about not just standard of entry but maintaining fitness for practice.’

Whipps Cross Hospital in east London has tested nurses’ competencies in a similar way, but the exercise was a one-off and there are no plans to repeat it every three years.

The NMC will later this year consider changes to revalidation procedures, which currently involve only a self-declaration of good health and fitness to practise, and a requirement that registrants carry out five days of study every three years.