Mixed reaction from profession as nurses’ regulation is reviewed

By Nursing Standard reporters

A government review of the future of nurse regulation has been welcomed by leading nurses, although not all its recommendations have received unanimous support.

England’s chief nursing officer (CNO) Chris Beasley reassured nurses that it was not the performance of non-medical staff that had prompted the review.

She said The Regulation of the Non-medical Healthcare Professions review had been ordered because it was timely to review the Nursing and Midwifery Council five years after its creation.

RCN general secretary Beverly Malone said: ‘The CNO’s comment that she has no significant concerns about the performance of non-medical staff is a testament to the skill and dedication of nurses everywhere.’

Outgoing NMC council member Cathy Warwick said she is worried about the proposal for a single body to oversee fitness to practise hearings of all health professionals. ‘My main concern is to ensure the body responsible for putting people on the register is also responsible for deciding who stays on the register.’

NHS Employers deputy director Alastair Henderson said it was right to recognise employers’ responsibility for the continuing competency of their staff.

‘The workload of directors of nursing will be huge and I have concerns they will be forced to take on more’

He said: ‘NHS organisations want the regulatory process to be consistent across different professions, efficient in operation and in step with employer processes. These proposals will be a welcome contribution to achieving these aims.’

Celia Davies, author of the book Interpreting Professional Self-Regulation, is angry that reviews of nurses and doctors were presented in separate reports. ‘They should have been looked at together. We can never put in systems to guarantee against another Shipman, but if you bring in new regulations for one profession you should do it for all of them.’

Nurse Directors’ Association ambassador Liz Fradd said: ‘An enormous number of inappropriate cases are referred to the NMC. Perhaps the local screening of nurses by directors of nursing may reduce this. At the moment, I suspect many directors will not know when nurses are referred to the NMC and the review will force them to look at nursing practice.

‘However, the workload of directors of nursing will be huge and I have some concerns that they will be forced to take on yet more work. It is an interesting idea but training would be vital.’

Sally Taber, director of Independent Healthcare Advisory Services, which advises members on regulation, said she is delighted the revalidation system would be used in conjunction with the Knowledge and Skills Framework. ‘All acute independent sector organisations will have this framework in place. Mandatory yearly appraisals are already part of our national minimum standards,’ she said.

Unions worried by lack of progress on regulation of healthcare assistants

Unions have criticised plans to put the regulation of healthcare assistants (HCAs) on hold until the results of a pilot scheme are known later this year.

An employer-led voluntary register for HCAs is being trialled in Scotland. If successful, the scheme could be introduced across the UK, The Regulation of the Non-medical Healthcare Professions states.

But Unison head of nursing Gail Adams, pictured, believes the Department of Health has missed an opportunity to develop the regulation of HCAs. ‘More than 80 per cent of them want regulation because they see it as a method of ensuring public protection and establishing national standards,’ she added.

RCN public health policy adviser Jane Naish called for HCAs who work with nurses to be regulated immediately by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. ‘There is a great deal of confusion about the accountability of HCAs. Their role has advanced in recent years and they are doing invasive procedures.’

Ms Naish also argued that employer-led regulation is inadequate because many organisations are ‘too small’ to take on a regulatory role.